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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE AND ITS INVOLVEMENT THROUGHOUT THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Title:** **VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE AND ITS INVOLVEMENT THROUGHOUT THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR**
- Author:** Major Thomas D. McGinnis, USMC
- Thesis:** The Corps of Cadets at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) participated in only one battle during the American Civil War. This paper endeavors to ascertain why they were not involved in any other engagements, and to show how they were utilized in support of the Confederacy.
- Discussion:** As a state-supported institution, many VMI Cadets received a funded education in return for their loyalty and support to the state of Virginia. But a greater percentage paid the required annual tuition in order to receive a military education that instilled the discipline, knowledge, and leadership of a commissioned officer. Viewed as a necessary part of the educational experience, service to the state complimented the growth of the citizen-soldier. An example of such service occurred when a contingent of the Corps stood guard in Harper's Ferry, [West] Virginia for the execution of John Brown.
- The average Cadet age varied, but the majority was under the age of 18. This fact, coupled with desires of prominent families, who paid for their son's education while the country warred, and the value of a VMI graduate as an officer and leader of men, compelled the Institute and the state to utilize the Corps of Cadets in secondary duties, far removed from the horrors of battle. The Corps' involvement in the McDowell campaign of 1862 equated to burial details and logistical replenishment.
- As the Confederacy's demise increased, the urgent need for qualified and capable men necessitated the increased use of the Cadets. Their use in battle was only as a last resort in order to ensure victory. Such was the case at New Market, Virginia. When the tactical situation was deemed hopeless, the military value of the Corps was removed for service another day. This was seen when General Hunter occupied Lexington, Virginia and destroyed much of the Institute.
- By the end of the war, the Corps of Cadets were among the defensive forces in the city of Richmond, Virginia. They remained there as a last line of defense for the Confederate cause, but were never required to pay the ultimate sacrifice. Disbanded in April 1865, the Institute reopened its doors the following October, and continued to educate the citizen-soldier.

PREFACE

The Virginia Military Institute (VMI) was founded in 1839, and was established as an educational institution for those who guarded the state's arsenal in Lexington, Virginia. "Virginia—a state institution, neither sectional nor denominational. Military—its characteristic feature. Institute—something different from either college or university. The three elements thus indicated are the basis of a triangular pyramid, of which the sides will preserve their mutual relation to whatever height the structure may rise."¹ VMI is renown for producing mature, disciplined citizen-soldiers, many of whom take on leadership roles in military life and corporate America. Such men include General George C. Marshall, USA, Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr., and John D. DeButts, Chairman of the Board, AT&T.

As a 1986 graduate of VMI, I wrote this paper to gain greater knowledge of the Institute and how it supported the Confederacy during the American Civil War. This paper seeks to determine what factors influenced the decision to employ VMI Cadets in battle or to restrict their employment. The Corps' involvement at New Market is well known and documented, but other contributions made by the Institute during this war required long hours of research and archival assistance. I wish to thank my mentors, Dr. R. L. DiNardo and Colonel J. M. McCarl, Jr., USA, for their inputs, suggestions, and infinite patience. I also wish to thank Louise Arnold-Friend, Historical Services,

¹ *Virginia Military Institute—The Spirit*. Eds. William Butler and William Strode. (Prospect, Kentucky: Harmony House Publishers, 1989), p. 17. Hereafter cited as *The Spirit*. The quote comes from the Institute's founder, John Thomas Lewis Preston, a Lexington, Virginia attorney.

USAMHI in Carlisle Barracks, PA, James J. Dorrian, Chief, Research and Information Services, USAMHI in Carlisle Barracks, PA, and Diane Jacob, Archivist, Preston Library, VMI in Lexington, VA. *Semper Fidelis.*

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VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE AND ITS INVOLVEMENT THROUGHOUT THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

The time may come when your state may need your services; and if that time does come, then draw your swords and throw away your scabbards!

-- Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson: To the Cadets,
Virginia Military Institute, March 1861²

THE INSTITUTE

The Virginia Military Institute (VMI), along with other premier military colleges of the south, such as the Citadel and the University of Alabama, still exists today as a highly respected, reputable, and honorable institution. Aside from admitting women in 1997, VMI still educates the citizen-soldier in a similar fashion to that of its nineteenth century heyday. Tradition, military drill, uniforms, and the slang verbiage of mid-19th Century Virginia still reside behind the fortress-like walls of its impressive barracks.

On 29 March 1839, the Virginia legislature voted to establish a military school at the site of the State Arsenal in Lexington. A Board of Visitors was appointed by the Governor to oversee all matters pertaining to the school, and they, in turn, elected their first president of the Board, Claudius Crozet. A native of France and a graduate of Ecole Polytechnique, Crozet had served in Napoleon's army, taught at West Point, and was serving as the principle engineer of Virginia when elected. The Superintendent position

² Col. Robert Debs Heinl Jr., USMC (Ret.), *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations* (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute, 1988), p.52.

was offered to a young West Point graduate and mathematics teacher at Hampden-Sydney College. His name was Francis Henney Smith, and he would adapt many of the uniforms, rules, and regulations of West Point for the new school known as VMI. On 11 November 1839, VMI Cadets officially replaced the Arsenal Guard, establishing the date as Founder's Day.³

From the outset it was determined that the Virginia Military Institute would not be a carbon copy of West Point. "The objective of the school 'was not to fit its graduates for a single profession...but to prepare young men for the varied work of civil life....The military feature, though essential to its discipline, is not primary in its scheme of education.'"⁴ Twenty-eight Cadets began the educational process at VMI, studying English, Latin, mathematics, modern languages (French or German), natural Philosophy, civil and military engineering, Chemistry, and the Military Art (infantry tactics, military police, artillery science). Initially, completion of studies was set at three years, but the extensive number of courses prompted the Board of Visitors in 1845 to allow four years for studies to be completed.⁵

Requirements for admission into VMI were simple: be male, be of good moral character, be unmarried, be able to read and write and have a simple knowledge of arithmetic, and be between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five. This liberal admission policy addressed the needs and desires of families across the social and financial spectrum, setting an equal standard of education for all Cadets through complete

³ Judith Moreland Arnold and Diane B. Jacob, *A Virginia Military Institute Album, 1839-1910*. (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1982), p. 1.

⁴ James Lee Conrad, *The Young Lions*. (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1997), p. 4. Hereafter cited as Conrad.

diversification. Unfortunately, it also enabled families to enroll their sons for the purpose of reform. Smith recalled:

Many bad subjects were sent here to be reformed, [orig. underlined] and, although it was by no means a desirable thing to be in any sense a Reformatory School, or ‘House of Correction,’ we started with the idea that we would admit such bad subjects, and try and see what could be done with them.⁶

In 1860, VMI expanded its admissions to young men from other states. State-supported Cadets were bound to serve their individual state upon graduation, but as Cadets they were duty bound to adhere to orders from the Governor of Virginia and the VMI Board of Visitors. This made VMI a southern military institution, giving it recognition by many as the West Point of the South. By 1864, nearly 10% of the Cadets came from homes outside Virginia, all of which were a part of the Confederacy.⁷

Service to the individual’s state as both a Cadet and a graduate was viewed by the Board as an opportunity to expand an individual’s horizons. It instilled pride and unity while teaching responsibility. It also gave the Cadet a better appreciation of the State’s civic duties and political hierarchy. Service included marching in parades, escorting the Governor, assisting in the development of public works, and assisting in crowd control for inaugurations and executions. By 1859 the Corps of Cadets from VMI was accustomed to such service; their commitment to the State would entangle them in numerous duties outside the Institute’s walls, leading them down a path destined for service on the battlefield.

⁵ Conrad, p. 14.

⁶ Conrad, p. 18.

THE BROWN EXECUTION

As soon as I heard of the invasion of our rights and territory, by the gang of marauders headed by John Brown, I deemed it my duty as well as privilege to tender the services of the officers and cadets to the governor, for any duty to which he might think proper to assign them.

--Colonel Francis H. Smith, VA Militia, semi-annual report of VMI submitted to Virginia Governor Henry Wise on 16 January 1860.⁸

John Brown was born 9 May 1800 in Torrington, Connecticut, but spent much of his youth in Hudson, Ohio where he acquired a thorough knowledge of the Bible. The father of 20 children, he moved his family to North Elba, New York where he rallied support for the abolitionist cause. Passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which allowed citizens to decide whether the territory should be slave or free, prompted bitter conflict between pro- and anti-slavery forces, and triggered Brown's use of violence. Over the next four years Brown instigated raids and rebellions, some resulting in the death of pro-slavery men, and "established a reputation as a fearless, ruthless enemy of slavery."⁹

In the summer of 1859, John Brown started a series of events that significantly heightened animosities between an increasingly divided north and south. Renting a Maryland farmhouse near the federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry, [West] Virginia, Brown and a band of 16 white, 5 black abolitionists attacked and captured the arsenal on 16

⁷ Conrad, p. 5. Some Cadets came from West Virginia, which was recognized as a state in 1863.

⁸ "The Execution of John Brown Documents, November 1859-January 1860." A Civil War Resource from the VMI Archives. URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/%7Earchhtml/jbannrpt.html>>. Accessed 26 December 2000.

October. Holding nearly 60 local citizens as hostages, Brown hoped to spark a slave insurrection that would ultimately lead to the formation of an ‘army of emancipation.’¹⁰ Brown’s group held off the local militia, but on 18 October he surrendered to a small force of U. S. Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lee, after ten of his followers (including two of his sons) were killed. Brown was convicted of murder, inciting slave insurrection, and treason against the state; his sentence was to hang until dead.

The fear of additional uprisings by Brown’s supporters prompted Governor Henry A. Wise of Virginia to send Smith and a part of the Corps of Cadets to Charlestown, [West] Virginia, no later than 1 December, in order to carry out the execution.

Smith, by directive of the governor, was placed in charge of the execution itself. Overall command of the cadet detachment was given to VMI faculty member William Gilham, who also commanded two cadet infantry companies consisting of 64 cadets. His colleague Major Thomas J. Jackson, was placed in command of the artillery—two howitzers manned by 21 cadets.¹¹

The VMI Detachment arrived in Charlestown on 26 November. Smith’s General Order No. 1, dated 28 November 1859, stated, “The detachment of cadets called into the service of the State, being now on war footing all the rules and articles of war governing an army in the field will govern this command.”¹² Mindful of the press and the overall public attention, Smith was determined to keep good order while displaying the value of the VMI Corps of Cadets.

⁹ *New Standard Encyclopedia*, under “Brown, John.”

¹⁰ “The Execution of John Brown Documents, November 1859-January 1860,” *A Civil War Resource from the VMI Archives*. URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/cwjbrown.html>>. Accessed 24 December 2000.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “VMI Cadets at the Execution of John Brown,” *Virginia Military Institute Order Book, November 19-December 12, 1859*. URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/ob859jb.html>>. Accessed 24 December 2000.

On 2 December, Brown's sentence was carried out. In a letter to his wife, Mary Anna, Major Jackson described the execution in detail.

In this condition he stood on the trap door, which was supported on one side by hinges, and on the other (south side) by a rope, for about 10 minutes, when Col. S [Smith] told the Sheriff 'all is ready,' which apparently was not comprehended by the Sheriff, and the Col. had to repeat the order, when the rope was cut by a single blow, and Brown fell through about 25 inches, so as to bring his knees on a level with the position occupied by his feet before the rope was cut. With the fall his arms below the elbow flew up, hands clenched, & his arms gradually fell by spasmodic motions—there was very little motion of his person for several minutes, after which the wind blew his lifeless body to & fro.¹³

Smith and the detachment of Cadets remained in Charlestown until 6 December in order to keep good order while Brown's body was prepared for shipment to Baltimore. They returned to Lexington on 10 December, first stopping in Richmond where they were greeted and congratulated by Governor Wise and the Virginia Assembly. In Smith's semi-annual report of VMI to the Governor, dated 16 January 1860, he closed with the following two paragraphs.

It gives me great pleasure to report, that the novel duty thus assigned to the corps of cadets, although at times involving much exposure and hardship, was discharged with an alacrity and fidelity which reflected the highest credit upon them, and won from all observers the plaudits of approval. I am pleased to add that my command returned to their regular duty on the 10th [of] December without the slightest accident, or without a single case of serious sickness.

It has afforded me much gratification to know that the service thus discharged on the part of the institution was in perfect harmony with the wishes of the parents and friends of those who accompanied the detachment. One widowed mother, who had three sons under my command, thus wrote to them: '*My dear boys---only think of your being in camp, preparing for war! – and civil war too! And yet I*

¹³ "The Execution of John Brown Documents, November 1859-January 1860," *A Civil War Resource from the VMI Archives*. URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/jbtjlet.html>>. Accessed 24 December 2000.

would not have you back, even if I could. I would not have one of my sons to be recreant to their state in this her hour of trial.' Such is the spirit of the mothers of Virginia.¹⁴

CAMP LEE

How I hated that little cadet! He was always so wide-awake, so clean, so interested in the drill; his coat-tails were so short and sharp, and his hands looked so big in white gloves. He made me sick.

--Virginian George Bagby, CSA Recruit, 1861¹⁵

Virginia's secession from the Union on 17 April 1861 was controversial in the eyes of many native Virginians. Many felt that the actions of South Carolina were hasty and lacked careful consideration, but President Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers into military service in order to suppress the insurrection, done two days earlier, was viewed by the majority as an act of war against the seceded states. Major Thomas J. Jackson, an instructor at VMI, sided with the minority. He publicly exclaimed, "It is better...for the South to fight for her rights in the Union than out of it."¹⁶

Most Virginians adhered to the belief of a state's right to secede. When it became clear that civil war could not be avoided, many like Jackson chose service to their native state over service to the Union. It was a difficult choice for many, but the loyalty and

¹⁴ "The Execution of John Brown Documents, November 1859-January 1860," *A Civil War Resource from the VMI Archives*. URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/%7Earchhtml/jbannrpt.html>>. Accessed 26 December 2000. Note: Italics are displayed in the electronic citation.

¹⁵ Conrad, p. 38.

¹⁶ G.F.R. Henderson, Lieut.-Col., C.B., *Stonewall Jackson & the American Civil War*. (New York, New York: Konecky & Konecky, n.d.), p. 99. Hereafter cited as Henderson.

patriotism to the state was generally greater than that of national pride. Many saw the Federal government as a pawn to the northern states' way of life, particularly with the election of President Abraham Lincoln. "They were not, in their own opinion, rebels at all; they were defending their States—that is, the nations to which they conceived themselves to belong, from invasion and conquest."¹⁷

Soon after Virginia's declaration of secession, Governor Letcher requested the services of VMI Cadets as instructors for new recruits. Smith assigned Jackson to command the detachment, which arrived in Richmond on 22 April with 185 Cadets.

Very soon the entire country around Richmond assumed the appearance of one vast encampment. The Central Fair Grounds, about a mile and a half above the city, were used for the camp of instruction. Thither volunteer companies were sent, the [sic] there they were drilled in the manual of military exercises, by Colonel Smith and his corps of cadets from the Virginia Military Institute at Lexington. Colonel Gilham [sic] was placed in command of the camp, and from the raw material furnished him he sent out many regiments of well-drilled soldiery.¹⁸

Virginia quickly became the dividing line of the North-South military frontier, and Richmond quickly became a decisive point for the Union following the 20 May vote to make it the capital of the Confederacy. Volunteers and organized militias poured into the city from all walks of life and every county in the state; Camp Lee soon flourished with the sounds of close-order drill and the manual of arms.¹⁹ (Map 1)

Camp Lee, the rendezvous of the Virginia army, presented a peculiar if animated scene. With few exceptions, every man capable of serving in the field belonged either to the militia or the volunteers. Some of the

¹⁷ Henderson, pp. 99-100.

¹⁸ Sallie Brock Putnam. *Richmond During the War: Four Years of Personal Observation*. Intro. Virginia Scharff. (Lincoln, Nebraska: Bison Books, 1996. Orig. published New York, New York: G. W. Carleton, 1867), pp. 33-34. Hereafter cited as Putnam.

¹⁹ Ernest B. Furgurson. *Ashes of Glory: Richmond at War*. (New York, New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 43-47. Hereafter cited as Furgurson.

companies had a smattering of drill, but the majority were absolutely untaught, and the whole were without the slightest conception of what was meant by discipline. And it was difficult to teach them.²⁰

The Cadets were often praised for their skills, attitude, and patience. Even after newly promoted Colonel Jackson was assigned to duties in Harper's Ferry, [West] Virginia, the Cadets continued to prepare recruits for future combat. Camp Lee was a novelty, as were the Cadets, and throngs of spectators gathered daily to watch the training while discussing the future. “We were often astonished at the patience and diligence displayed by the cadets in training recruits”, one of these lady visitors wrote. ‘Never showing weariness, they took delight in teaching the prospective soldier.’²¹ Similar stories filled the Richmond newspapers, such as the 22 May 1861 article in the *Richmond Daily Whig*.

The Fair Grounds.-Crowds of ladies and gentlemen repair every afternoon to the “Camp of Instruction” of the Virginia Volunteers, at the Heritage Fairgrounds; to the encampment near the Reservoir, and to other places of military interest, near the city, to view the battalion drills and dress parades. The proficiency of the Lexington Cadets, who are quartered at the first mentioned place, is something wonderful to behold, and worth going a long distance to see.²²

Growing Cadet frustration, particularly with regard to pay, was displayed in a letter from Cadet Gatewood to his parents on 29 May 1861. “I don’t care so much for the money, but everybody else are getting paid but the cadets and they are doing more good for the State than all the other officers put together.”²³ Civilian and military

²⁰ Henderson, p. 104.

²¹ Conrad, p. 40.

²² “The Fair Grounds.” *Richmond Daily Whig*, 22 May 1861. URL: <http://www.mdgorman.com/richmond_daily_whig_5221861a.htm>. Accessed 17 September 2000.

²³ Conrad, p. 40.

leadership in Virginia knew the value of the Cadets' efforts; on 22 June, each Cadet drillmaster received twenty dollars plus subsistence for his services.²⁴

VMI's Superintendent, then Colonel Francis H. Smith, in a letter to Virginia's Governor dated 20 June 1861, requested active service and proposed to lead the Cadets into battle as a battalion. Smith's request was declined; most expected the war to be short in duration, and the value of the Cadets behind the lines, coupled with their youth, gave reason that their service as officers would better serve Virginia.

This initial request to actively involve the Cadets in battle is intriguing, for later that same year, and for years to come, Smith echoed the sentiments of the Governor and fought to keep the Institute and the Cadets active in the pursuit of higher education. Perhaps Smith realized that the war would continue for years with great devastation, or perhaps he worried that the Institute would cease to exist without direct involvement in the war. Whatever his reasoning, Smith spent much of the war holding VMI together, preaching the value of education and service as an officer. A letter from Smith to the Adjutant General of Virginia, William H. Richardson, dated 23 November 1861, expressed the views of Smith and VMI's Board of Visitors:

From instructions just received, the result of the recent attack on Hilton Head, I am led to believe the same demonstration is expected here, and that the reliance of the Department is not merely upon skillful, drilled artillerists, but upon having officers in charge who understand the theory as well as practice of artillery service. I think that all that is valuable in the art of war may be secured by having an understanding with the Confederate Government that at each annual examination the Secretary of War shall notify the Board of Visitors of the number of officers required for military service...that they may examine the graduating classes...and report to the President the names of such as are

²⁴ Conrad, p. 40.

recommended for commissions...This would give the Government all the advantage it might require of the school.²⁵

VMI's reluctance to fully participate in the war was stemmed from the fact that many families, some very prominent, had sent their sons to VMI in order get an education while avoiding the war. Many Cadets were only 14 or 15 years of age, but it was those eligible for service without their parents consent, 18 years and older, that got the attention of the instructors. VMI continuously stressed that the needs of the state outweighed the needs of the individual, and that the shortage of qualified officers required them to remain steadfast in their pursuit of a commission.

VMI's commitment to educate and train future officers, its prestige as a military institution, and its desire to keep the Cadet out of harm's way ensured a steady supply of pupils and income. All of VMI's Cadets, until 1860, were Virginians, but the demands from families in other states quickly made VMI a southern institution. Some Cadets were classified as regular, or state-supported, but the majority of Cadets were irregular and paid tuition.²⁶ The financial success enjoyed by VMI in the early years of the war most certainly factored into the Board's request to abstain from direct conflict.

By the end of June, the Cadets in Richmond had been furloughed for graduation and the upcoming term, but not all who made the journey to Richmond returned. Many Cadets, including John Stuart Moffett, accompanied Colonel Jackson to Harper's Ferry to

²⁵ United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Series IV, Volume 1, p. 775.

²⁶ Conrad, p. 5.

assist in training. Nine other Cadets, including Charles R. Norris, were retained by Jackson in late April when they escorted five wagons of gunpowder to the town.²⁷ With

the Cadets return to Lexington for the fall term, Camp Lee's emphasis on training shifted towards the artillery, and Captain John C. Shields of the First Howitzers in Leesburg, was put in charge. By the fall months of 1861, there were roughly 25 artillery companies in the training camps surrounding Richmond.²⁸

The Cadets would return to Camp Lee several times over the course of the war, and few would witness hostilities first-hand, but on 21 July 1861 Cadets Moffett, Norris, and Moore became the first Cadets to die in action against Brigadier General Irvin McDowell's Federal Army of North Eastern Virginia, later known as the Army of the Potomac, at the First Battle of Bull Run.²⁹

THE McDOWELL CAMPAIGN

I have from the beginning of the war maintained that the Rebels would leave Virginia and probably the field without a decisive battle. Lately I have thought they intended to fight one battle and, losing that, to disperse. Now it seems they will not fight even that one.

--Colonel David Hunter Strother, USA, 9 May 1862³⁰

²⁷ Conrad, pp. 42-43.

²⁸ John C. Shields, "The Old Camp Lee," *Richmond Dispatch*, 22 May 1898. SHSP 26 (1898), pp. 241-246. URL: <http://www.mdgorman.com/old_camp_lee.htm>. Accessed 17 September 2000.

²⁹ Conrad, pp. 43-44.

³⁰ *A Virginia Yankee in the Civil War: The Diaries of David Hunter Strother*. Eds. Cecil D. Eby, Jr. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1961), pp. 32-33. Hereafter cited as *Strother*.

The continuation of hostilities at the beginning of 1862 forced Smith to make some fundamental changes in the educational curriculum at VMI. Endeavoring to keep the Institute functional became an increasingly difficult challenge; Cadet resignations

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throughout 1861, done for the sole purpose of enlisting in the army, created a void of older, more experienced Cadets. To increase morale and reduce resignations, Smith changed the educational philosophy “from producing citizen-soldiers, who may have to serve in the military, to producing trained officers specifically for service in the military.”³¹

Smith’s changes did very little to reduce resignations. “‘The cadets are resigning very fast...all think they ought to be in the army,’ wrote VMI Cadet John B. Snodgrass to his sister on March 29, 1862.”³² Some Cadets resorted to desertion, but the possibility of capture, the resulting dishonorable dismissal and the label of being a deserter, pushed Cadets to seek dismissal through the neglect of their studies or poor behavior. Major Shipp, who became VMI’s new Commandant of Cadets in January, 1862, vowed to dismiss “any cadet neglectful of his military duties or deficient in academics. After one examination alone, seventy cadets were dismissed.”³³ By July 1862, only 143 of the 268 Cadets enrolled at the beginning of the year remained at VMI.³⁴

Smith’s resolve to keep the Cadets out of harm’s way eventually gave way to the necessity of keeping the Institute alive. Appeals to patience and patriotism, coupled with fewer restrictions and greater leniency, were adopted by Smith and the faculty overnight.

³¹ Conrad, p. 47.

³² Conrad, p. 49.

³³ Conrad, p. 50.

³⁴ Conrad, p. 50.

One Cadet commented, “As General Smith says, be soldiers in the next army, after the present one has been killed off.”³⁵ Ironically, the survival of VMI did not come about from such tactics, but as a result of the first Conscription Act passed by the Confederate

Congress on 16 April 1862.

The arrival of conscription eventually stimulated enrollment at VMI. Parents sought protection for their sons; as an academic institution that stressed the rigors of drill and the leadership of officers, VMI was seen as the best place to prepare them for an uncertain future. Although Congress refused to exempt students at military colleges, it desired to keep such institutions intact and instructed President Davis to exercise discretion. Virginia’s Governor Letcher took an additional step and “ordered Smith not to surrender any conscripted cadet until the constitutionality of the Conscription Act was decided.”³⁶ By the end of April concern over resignations and conscription quickly abated; news of Federal forces approaching Staunton, Virginia forced Smith to cancel classes in preparation for defense of the Institute.

Ordered by President Lincoln on 8 March to advance against Richmond, General-in-Chief McClellan took his army of 100,000 down the Chesapeake Bay to Fort Monroe. Additional Union forces in the field included McDowell’s 40,000 at Fredericksburg and a mix of armies throughout the Shenandoah Valley, commanded by Generals Milroy, Schenck, Fremont, and Banks, numbering nearly 70,000. As military advisor to President Davis, General Lee realized that the Confederate forces defending Richmond were greatly outnumbered. Knowing President Lincoln’s sensitivity about Washington,

³⁵ Conrad, p. 50.

³⁶ Conrad, p. 52.

Lee recommended that Major General “Stonewall” Jackson’s army of nearly 18,000 move through the Shenandoah in an effort to disrupt Federal strategy by threatening Washington. On 1 May 1862, Jackson and Brigadier General Richard S. Ewell began

operations that would eventually stymie 70,000 Federal troops and force the Union to rethink its campaign strategy.³⁷

Shortly after noon on 5 May, Jackson arrived in Staunton with a token force under Brigadier General Edward “Allegheny” Johnson and the VMI Corps of Cadets.³⁸ Use of the Cadets was authorized by the governor for defense of the Institute, but Smith rationalized “that the school’s best defense was a successful offense by Jackson.” VMI’s Board of Visitors, learning of the Corps’ movement the day after the Cadets left the Institute, wrote to Smith informing him of their disapproval. The letter ended with, “There is no authority for it and the board thinks it would be a breach of good faith on the part of the Institution towards parents and guardians.”³⁹

In Staunton, Smith received two more telegrams echoing the Board’s disapproval, but neither of the dispatches gave Smith instructions for what to do with the Cadets. Smith decided to force the issue and telegraphed that if he heard no additional word by morning, he would treat the current dispatches as an order not to cooperate with Jackson. That same afternoon a dispatch arrived from Adjutant General Richardson, stationed in Richmond. It read, “Your dispatch...was sent to the governor who endorsed it ‘I do not

³⁷ R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History*. (New York, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1970), pp. 873-875. Hereafter cited as Dupuy & Dupuy.

³⁸ Harold R. Woodward, Jr., *Defender of the Valley*. (Berryville, Virginia: Rockbridge Publishing Company, 1996), p. 53. Hereafter cited as Woodward.

³⁹ Conrad, p. 54.

see now how the cadets can be sent back. I think it best to let them go on. The mischief is done and we shall have to let it alone.”⁴⁰

With the governor’s approval, Smith turned his attention to the matters at hand.

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The Corps of Cadets, minus eleven who remained behind at the wishes of their parents, were officially attached to Brigadier General Charles S. Winder’s Stonewall Brigade on the evening of 6 May. The next day Jackson’s force rapidly marched west toward the town of McDowell in an effort to reinforce Johnson. The Cadets kept pace with the veterans, energized by the anticipation of battle. In twenty-two hours they covered a stretch of forty-four miles. On 8 May, the Confederate forces engaged Fremont’s lead army at McDowell, the Union forces commanded by Milroy and Schenck⁴¹.

The battle was small, with only about 8,000 men engaged from both sides. Jackson and Johnson halted the Federal advance by nightfall, sending the Union forces on the retreat toward Franklin. The Cadets were never engaged in the battle, and their letters reflected great disappointment, but Jackson had told Smith that their duties in the rear would serve well by freeing others for battle. On 9 May, “Jackson assigned the cadets the grisly task of burying the dead and collecting the wounded. Many paled at their first sight of the torn bodies but soon overcame their disgust and began clearing away the dead.”⁴² Cadet Sergeant Benjamin A. Colonna, upon entering a brick home, wrote that

“[a] dead man laid on top of the piano, and in the dining-room on the table there was a litter with a man on it. This man had a triangular hole knocked in the top of his head, and his brains had run out on the floor, leaving the front half of his skull entirely empty; yet he breathed, and

⁴⁰ Conrad, p. 54.

⁴¹ Conrad, pp. 55-56.

⁴² Conrad, p. 56.

when we gave him water from a sponge, that we found in his mouth, he sucked it vigorously and opened his eyes.”⁴³

On 10 May, Jackson’s forces renewed their march in pursuit of Schenck and Milroy, but two days later Jackson changed direction in order to pursue General Banks,

hoping to lure Federal troops camped in the vicinity of Richmond. For four days the Cadets pressed the ground beside the veterans in torrential downpours, reaching Lebanon Springs on 16 May. Jackson decided to send the Cadets back to Lexington, content that their services were no longer required, and thanked them for their assistance and efficiency. “Cadet Snodgrass proudly wrote home on May 18, the day after his return to Lexington, that the Corps had survived ‘one of the most toilsome marches of 10 days ever endured by an army.’”⁴⁴ His sister later wrote to him saying, ‘The New York Herald says General Jackson has been reinforced by 2000 well drilled cadets.’⁴⁵

General Smith was impressed and proud of the Cadets’ performance. In July of that year he submitted his annual report to the Board of Visitors, reaffirming the positive aspects of their support to Jackson.

It showed them that war was not a pastime, but was an irksome and laborious duty; and most of the restlessness among them...has been quieted. Besides, this military expedition has, in a measure, vindicated the manhood of those, many of who, although below the legal age for military service, were restless under the reputation of a peace establishment.⁴⁶

Also a vital part of that educational experience was the loss of one Cadet. Cadet

⁴³ Conrad, pp. 56-57.

⁴⁴ Conrad, p. 58.

⁴⁵ Conrad, p. 58.

⁴⁶ Conrad, p. 58.

Private John T. D. Gisiner succumbed from an illness while on the march. The loss of one of their own gave a certain reality to the fragility of life, and reinforced the notion that death came in many forms, particularly in times of war. The Cadets' experience with death would soon grow, and they, along with all who favored the Confederacy, would mourn the loss of one of their greatest leaders.⁴⁷

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THE DEATH OF STONEWALL

The Institute will be heard from today.

--General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, CSA, 2 May 1863⁴⁸

For the Virginia Military Institute, 1863 was a year highlighted by continuous forced marches and the mourning of a fallen comrade. Enrollments were on the rise, but the normal provisions to sustain them became difficult to obtain. Inflation continued to rise, a result of the Federal blockade of Southern ports, which in turn created problems in obtaining required supplies, particularly textbooks. Along with food, books were frequently received by Cadets from home. The Institute as a whole was tightening its belt. Other items, such as window glass, were impossible to get, and cloth became so scarce that the Cadets were only authorized to wear their coatees (dress jackets) during 'drill or dress duty.'⁴⁹ As the campaigns of spring began, so too did the horrors of war; the Cadet coatee would soon be worn in mourning.

⁴⁷ Conrad, p. 58.

⁴⁸ *The Spirit*, p. 22.

⁴⁹ Conrad, pp. 64-65.

The death of Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall” Jackson at 1515 hours on 10 May 1863, the result of an accidental shooting while reconnoitering his lines on 2 May, was a terrible blow to those who knew him at VMI. Excerpts from orders, diaries, and newspaper articles epitomize the Institute’s role in laying Jackson’s body to rest in Lexington, Virginia. The following is General Order No. 30 from VMI’s Superintendent, Major General Smith:

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Head Quarters Virginia Military Institute
May 13th, 1863
General Order No. 30

It is the painful duty of the Superintendent to announce to the officers and Cadets of this Institution the death of their late associate and Professor Lieut. General Thomas J. Jackson. He died at Guinea’s Station, Caroline Co. Va on the 10th inst [sic] of Pneumonia [sic], after a short but violent illness, supervening upon the sever [sic] wound received in the battle of Chancellorsville. A nation mourns the loss of Genl. [sic] Jackson. First in the heart of the brave men he has so often led to victory, there is not a home in the Confederacy that will not feel the loss and lament it as a great national calamity....

Reverence the memory of such a man as General Jackson. Imitate his virtues, and here, over his lifeless remains, reverently dedicate your service, and your life, if need be, in defense of the cause so dear to his heart; the cause for which he fought and bled, the cause in which he died.

Let the Cadet Battery, which he so long commanded, honor his memory by half-hour guns tomorrow from sunrise to sunset, under the direction of the commandant of cadets. Let his lecture room be draped in mourning for the period of six months.

Let the officers and cadets of the Institute wear the usual badge of mourning for the period of thirty days; and it is respectfully recommended to the alumni of the institution to unite in this last tribute of respect to the memory of their late professor. All duties will be suspended tomorrow.

By Command of Major-General Smith. A. Govan Hill, Acting Adjutant,
VMI.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ “Death of Stonewall Jackson,” *Virginia Military Institute General Orders, May 1863*. (Lexington,

The following diary entries are from VMI Cadet Charles T. Haigh, who became a Lieutenant in the 37th North Carolina Infantry Regiment and was killed in battle at Spotsylvania on 12 May 1864.

Thursday May 14, [1863]

Gen. Jackson's body arrived by the boat at 1 o'clock—was escorted to

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Barracks by the Corps and placed in his old Section room which room is draped in mourning for the period of six months. He is in a fine metallic coffin. The *first flag* made in the South of the new design covers his coffin—on the flag wreaths of evergreens and flowers. It is the request of his wife that he shall be buried tomorrow. Half hour guns have been firing from [illegible] fired from his old battery.

Friday May 15, [1863]

Guns have been firing all morning in honor of the lamented Jackson. Friday afternoon. The procession formed in front of the Sally port at half past ten. Commenced to move at 11. Corps in front of caisson on which he was borne. Then a company of Cavalry, after that a company composed of all the wounded and all that were once members of the old Stonewall Brigade. Bells were tolling all over town. Funeral sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. White.⁵¹

The following is an excerpt from the town newspaper, the *Lexington Gazette*.

....The Escort was composed as follows:

1. Cadet Battalion
2. Battery of Artillery of 4 pieces, the same battery he had for ten years commanded as Instructor of Artillery and which had also served with him at 1st Manassas, in [the] Stonewall Brigade.
3. A company of the original Stonewall Brigade, composed of members of different companies of the Brigade, and commanded by Capt. A. Hamilton, bearing the flag of the "Liberty Hall Volunteers."
4. A company of convalescent officers and soldiers of the army.

Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives). URL:

<<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/tjgo30.html>>. Accessed 24 December 2000.

⁵¹ "Death of Stonewall Jackson, May 1863," *Excerpt from Diary of Cadet Charles T. Haigh, Manuscript #016*. (Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives). URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/tjhaigh.html>>. Accessed 24 December 2000.

5. A Squadron of cavalry was all that was needed to complete the escort prescribed by the Army Regulations. This squadron opportunely made its appearance before the procession moved from the church. The Squadron was a part of Sweeny's battalion of Jenkin's command, and many of its members were from the General's native North-western Virginia.

6. The Clergy.

7. The Body enveloped in the Confederate Flag and covered with flowers, was borne on a caisson of the Cadet Battery, draped in mourning....

8. The Family and Personal Staff of the deceased.

9. The Governor of Va., Confederate States Senator Henry of Tenn. The Sergeant-at-Arms of C.S. Senate, and a member of the City of

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Richmond Council.

10. Faculty and Officers of Va. Mil. Institute.

11. Elders and Deacons of Lexington Presbyterian Church of which Church Gen. Jackson was a Deacon.

12. Professors and Students of Washington College.

13. Franklin Society.

14. Citizens.⁵²

Following the Institute's participation in Jackson's funeral, the Cadets finished their studies, graduating 14 (many Cadets had left for service earlier) at the close of July 1863. On 13 August, the Corps was detailed to capture army deserters, the success of which was never recorded, and on 25 August, Smith's Cadets were sent out to Bath Alum Springs at the request of Colonel William L. "Mudwall" Jackson, a second cousin of Stonewall. Union cavalry under Brigadier General William Woods Averell had attacked and destroyed the saltpeter works and gunpowder factories of western Virginia, but the threat to the small towns surrounding Lexington never materialized and the Cadets returned two days later.⁵³

⁵² "Funeral of Stonewall Jackson," *Lexington Gazette*, May 20, 1863. (Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives). URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/tjjobit.html>>. Accessed 24 December 2000.

⁵³ Conrad, pp. 78-79.

One positive aspect of this minor deployment was the decisive response Smith received regarding his duties and roles in defense of the Institute. The governor, in contact with President Davis, left such duties to the discretion of Smith, allowing him to go on the offensive if he felt it was necessary. “The only restriction on his discretion was that ‘needless exposure of the corps of cadets shall be carefully avoided.’”⁵⁴ Smith was grateful for their trust, and continued to deploy the Corps of Cadets whenever a threat approached the southern portion of the valley.

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That threat continued to be Averell, and the Corps deployed twice throughout November and December of 1863 in order to thwart his attacks, but marching was the only action they ever saw. As the year ended, the Institute continued the academic schedule despite the difficulties of obtaining materials and supplies. The entire Confederacy was soon facing harder times, and with the Federal offensives sure to come in the spring of 1864, increases in desperate measures would soon be required by all, including the Cadets.⁵⁵

INTO BATTLE

Put the boys in, and may God forgive me for the order.

--General John C. Breckinridge, CSA, 15 May 1864⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Conrad, p. 80.

⁵⁵ Conrad, pp. 80-83.

⁵⁶ William C. Davis, *The Battle of New Market*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978 Special Edition), p. 122. Hereafter cited as Davis.

The splendor of rolling hills, abundant fields, and mountainous scenery in the Shenandoah Valley has changed little since the beginning of hostilities in 1861. Union Army journalist Major Charles G. Halpine wrote in May 1864 that, “All the romance of the war is in this valley.”⁵⁷ Stretching over 165 miles in length, from Lexington, Virginia to Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, and roughly 30 miles in width, situated between the Alleghenies and Blue Ridge Mountains, the Shenandoah quickly became an area of great operational and strategic importance. Geographically, it offered ample room for flanking

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maneuvers, concealed movements, and direct passage to the north, but of far greater value was its potential for supporting large armies. Fertile soil provided inhabitants with enormous quantities of crops, while growing towns, such as Staunton, provided rail yards for the Virginia Central Railroad, warehouses, hospitals, and militias. (Map 2 & Map 3)

Numerous Confederate and Union Armies traveled up (South) and down (North) the valley throughout the war; history records a total of 326 engagements.⁵⁸ In 1862, clashes occurred in Port Republic, Cross Keys, Front Royal, and Winchester. From 30 April to 9 June 1862, with less than 18,000 men, Brigadier General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson harassed and checked nearly 70,000 Union forces commanded by Major General John C. Fremont and General N. P. Banks.⁵⁹ Weeks prior to the Battle of Gettysburg, on June 13-14 1863, Brigadier General Richard S. Ewell fought General Robert H. Milroy at the Second Battle of Winchester. But it was the Valley Campaign of 1864 that wrought the most death and destruction. Union officers, such as General Philip

⁵⁷ Davis, p. 1.

⁵⁸ James Gindlesperger, *Seed Corn of the Confederacy*. (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: Burd Street Press, 1997), p. xviii. Hereafter cited as Gindlesperger.

⁵⁹ Dupuy and Dupuy, p. 875.

H. Sheridan, General David Hunter, Major General George Crook, and Major General Franz Sigel, fought Confederate leaders, namely Major General Jubal Early, Brigadier General John D. Imboden, and Major General John Breckinridge, in battles that nearly obliterated the fields and infrastructure of the beloved valley.

One such battle, the Battle of New Market, gained notoriety for the Confederacy's use of 257 teenage schoolboys, cadets attending the Virginia Military Institute.⁶⁰ In the

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spring of 1864, Major General Franz Sigel commanded the Union's Department of West Virginia, which included a portion of the Shenandoah Valley. Born in Germany, Sigel was highly regarded by the German-American community and rapidly advanced through the ranks. Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's campaign plan required Sigel's forces to harass the Virginia Central Railroad system in Staunton, capturing the town and its supplies if possible. Sigel's secondary mission would simply be to keep Confederate troops occupied in order to decrease forces from General Robert E. Lee's army, which were opposing Grant's.

General Lee, aware of Union forces heading up the valley, dispatched troops under Major General John C. Breckinridge to resist the advance. Breckenridge was well known by all Americans. He had been the United States' Vice-President under James Buchanan, a U. S. Senator, and a candidate for President against Abraham Lincoln. "A vocal opponent of Lincoln's war policies, he had alienated authorities in his home state of

⁶⁰ Gindlesperger, pp. 154-168. These pages are part of Appendix B, which provides a complete list of all VMI cadets and instructors, including age, rank, and billet, who participated in the Battle of New Market. The oldest cadet was 25 and the youngest 15; the average cadet age was 17.78.

Kentucky to the point where he was declared disloyal to the Union. In danger of arrest, he had cast his lot with the Confederate States of America.”⁶¹

On 29 March 1864, Major General E. O. C. Ord arrived at Sigel’s headquarters with a letter from Grant. Grant would move against Lee in early May; he directed a two-prong advance from West Virginia to coincide with his own movement. Sigel was tasked with assembling 8,000 infantry, 3 batteries, and 1,500 cavalry. Ord would command the force from Beverly, West Virginia, proceed to Covington, Virginia, and attack the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad while advancing toward the supply depot at Lynchburg. The second attack, lead by Crook in Charleston, West Virginia, would move against the

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same railroad near Saltville, Virginia, destroying the salt works at Saltville and the lead mines at Wytheville, followed by an advance that would meet Sigel in Staunton. The benefits of this two-prong attack would not only destroy valuable Confederate supplies and railroads, but would threaten the South’s supply depots in Staunton and Lynchburg.⁶²

Sigel’s orders were far less dramatic, and were not received until three days after Ord’s arrival. Grant ordered him to march south from Cumberland, West Virginia with a sufficient force in order to meet Ord and Crook with fresh supplies for a move against Staunton and Lynchburg. Grant had a low opinion of Sigel, but he also underestimated the potential for enemy resistance. Communications with his friend, Major General William T. Sherman, confirm his dislike for Sigel. “If Sigel can’t skin himself, he can hold a leg whilst someone else skins.”⁶³

⁶¹ Gindlesperger, p. xviii.

⁶² Davis, pp. 20-21.

⁶³ U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), Series I, Volume 33, pp. 799, 858, and

Clashes in personalities between Ord and Sigel, as well as animosity by Sigel for lack of a significant role in the campaign, ignited immediately. Ord, one of Grant's favorites, constantly loitered around Sigel's headquarters and barraged his staff with complaints. Heated arguments ensued; Sigel had only assembled 6,500 infantry, and he insinuated that he would not resupply Ord anywhere. Ord's complaints were followed by a letter requesting relief of his command, which Grant agreed to on 17 April. Forced to act quickly, Grant transferred command to Sigel and ordered him to advance from Cumberland, West Virginia to Cedar Creek, near Strasburg, beginning 2 May.⁶⁴

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Brigadier General John D. Imboden, commanding the Valley District under Major General John C. Breckinridge's Department of West Virginia, was also on the move on 2 May. He had reports of Union troops moving, commanded by Sigel, and moved forward with 1,492 men to determine their strength and location. On 3 May Imboden reported the sighting of troops from Romney to Wardensville, and on 4 May he arrived at Rude's Hill, located between New Market and Mount Jackson. Sigel's forces were in Front Royal, with his cavalry in Maurertown. On 5 May Imboden reached Woodstock. He was only 12 miles from Sigel, with intelligence reports from his scouts and local citizens estimating that nearly ten thousand Union troops were positioned in Strasburg. Outnumbered five to one, and with no possibility of reinforcement from Lee, Imboden quickly notified Breckinridge of the situation. His plan would be to use diversion and

Series I, Volume 32, Part 3, p. 246.
⁶⁴ Davis, p. 22.

guerilla tactics to slow the Union advance while preparations for reinforcement moved to assist him.⁶⁵

Imboden's tactics had some success, but did not dispel Sigel from continuing his march up the valley.

"Colonel [Jacob] Higgins was attacked and beaten by a detachment of Imboden's brigade between Wardensville and Moorefield on the 9th of May, and pursued north toward Romney. Colonel [William H.] Boyd was ambushed on his way from the Luray Valley to New Market on the 13th and defeated, suffering a loss of 125 men and 200 horses."⁶⁶

Occupying Woodstock, Sigel obtained telegraphic correspondence between Breckinridge and Imboden regarding the move of 4000 men toward Jackson River Depot. Another

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Confederate dispatch, from Staunton on 10 May, stated that, "Lee was driving the enemy at every point."⁶⁷ This news prompted Sigel to be more aggressive, in hopes that a Union success in the Shenandoah might cause Lee to pause and redistribute his forces. On 13 May he moved two regiments and the 1st New York (Lincoln) Cavalry forward. They met Imboden near Mount Jackson on the 14th and pushed them to New Market (7 miles from Mount Jackson, 19 miles from Sigel and the rest of his forces at Woodstock).

Imboden "rode to his men with orders to hold New Market at all cost."⁶⁸

Sigel's forces, known as the U. S. Department of West Virginia, consisted of Colonel Augustus Moor's 1st Brigade (18th CN, 28th OH, 116th OH, 123rd OH), Colonel

⁶⁵ Woodward, Jr., pp. 104-105.

⁶⁶ Franz Sigel, Major General, U.S.V., "Sigel in the Shenandoah Valley in 1864", n.d., URL: <http://civilwarhome.com/sigelatnewmarket.htm>, accessed 14 August 2000. Higgins and Boyd, with 500 and 300 cavalrymen, were assigned to protect Sigel's right and left flank against "raid" tactics, particularly from Lieutenant Colonel John S. Mosby's rangers.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Woodward, Jr., p. 108.

Joseph Thoburn's 2nd Brigade (1st WV, 12 WV, 34th MA, 54th PA), Colonel William B. Tibbitts 1st Cavalry Brigade (1st NY Veteran, 1st NY Lincoln, 1st MD, 21st WV, 14th PA), Colonel John E. Wynkoop's 2nd Cavalry Brigade (15th NY, 20th PA, 22nd PA), and individually commanded artillery batteries (Batt. B, MD Light, 30th NY Batt., Batt. D, 1st WV Light, Batt. G, 1st WV Light, Batt. B, 5th U.S.) operating 22 guns. The infantry division was commanded by Brigadier General Jeremiah C. Sullivan; the cavalry division by Major General Julius Stahel. In all, Sigel commanded 5,245 infantry, 3,035 cavalry, and 660 artillerymen—a total force of 8,940.⁶⁹

By the end of the day on 14 May, Breckinridge had marched his forces from Harrisonburg to Staunton, about 7 miles south of New Market. His forces consisted of Brigadier General John Echol's 1st Brigade (22nd VA, 23rd VA, 26th VA), Brigadier

General Gabriel C. Warton's 2nd Brigade (30th VA, 51st VA, 62nd VA, Co. A, 1st Missouri Cavalry (dismounted), 23rd VA, VMI Cadets), Brigadier General John D. Imboden's Valley District Cavalry (18th VA, 2nd MD Det., 23rd VA Det., 43rd VA Partisans), and Major William McLaughlin's Artillery (Chapman's VA Battery, Jackson's VA Battery, McClanahan's VA Battery, VMI's Section). In all, Breckinridge commanded 4,249 infantry and dismounted cavalry, 735 cavalry, and 341 artillerymen utilizing 18 guns—a total force of 5,325.⁷⁰ (Map 4)

On the evening of 14 May an artillery duel began which engaged nearly every gun of the two opposing forces. As darkness set in, Colonel George H. Smith, commanding

⁶⁹ Joseph W. A. Whitehorne, *Self-Guided Tour: The Battle of New Market*. (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1988), pp. 24-25. Hereafter cited as Whitehorne. Of the 8,940 men at Sigel's disposal, 6,280 were engaged.

⁷⁰ Whitehorne, pp. 24-25. Of the 5,325 men at Breckinridge's disposal, 4,876 were engaged.

the 62nd VA mounted, initiated the deployment of forces across a wide front. This gave the impression of a much larger force, but was risky due to the fact that if the Federals had massed any attack they would have annihilated the strung-out Confederate lines. Imboden was impressed and agreed with the strategy; time was critical and Breckinridge would not arrive until the next morning with his force of 3,833. Aside from the artillery and a few cavalry encounters, no other engagements took place on the night of 14 May. By 2330 hours all fighting ceased. Imboden had delayed Sigel's advance for over nine hours, giving reinforcements the time necessary to reach his position.⁷¹

VMI's Superintendent, General Smith, with approval from the Governor of Virginia, initiated the inclusion of the Corps of Cadets into Breckinridge's force. On 22 April 1864, in a letter for General Lee, Smith offered the services of the Corps of Cadets to Lee's Army. Such an offer was not consistent with correspondence dispatched in the

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earlier years of the war, but the desperations of the Confederacy and the campaigns destined for the near future, coupled with Cadet enlistments once they reached the age of 18, compelled Smith and the Board of Visitors to utilize VMI as an active fighting force. Lee's response was one of gratitude and admiration, but he proposed that Smith contact Breckinridge and Imboden and inform them of VMI's readiness to assist in their plans.⁷²

At 0100 on 15 May, the Corps of Cadets broke camp and prepared to march with Breckinridge's forces to New Market. They arrived prior to sunrise in the midst of heavy

⁷¹ Woodward, Jr., pp. 108-109.

⁷² John F. Hanna, VMI Cadet. "Diary Entries with Significant Correspondence, April-May 1864". Lexington, VA: Virginia Military Institute Archives, URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/ms0317.html>>. Accessed 17 September 2000. Correspondence includes a letter, dated 29 April 1864, from William H. Macfarland, President of VMI's Board of Visitors, to the Cadets, and General Lee's letter to General Smith, dated 25 April 1864.

rain. Breckinridge informed Lieutenant Colonel Scott Shipp, Commandant of Cadets, of the probable Federal attack, posting the Corps in reserve. Shipp wrote in his report, “He informed me that he did not wish to put the cadets in if he could avoid it, but that should occasion require it he would use them very freely.”⁷³ As dawn approached, southern forces anxiously awaited the northern advance, but Sigel’s plans did not include the offensive approach.

Sigel’s two regiments of infantry, along with the 1st NY Lincoln Cavalry, held Mount Jackson on the morning of the 15th. It wasn’t until 0500 that Sigel began to move his remaining forces from Woodstock to Mount Jackson. Arriving at 1000, he “rode forward to reconnoiter the ground and to decide whether we should advance farther or meet the enemy’s attack at Mount Jackson.”⁷⁴ From this look of the grounds Sigel saw

that the Rebels were massed for attack from within New Market, not Mount Jackson seven miles north of New Market. Sigel later wrote:

Believing that a retreat would have a bad effect on our troops, and well aware of the strategical value of New Market, commanding, as it did, the road to Luray, Culpeper [*sic*], and Charlottesville, as well as the road to Brock’s Gap and Moorefield, I resolved to bold [*sic*] the enemy in check until the arrival of our main forces from Mount Jackson and then accept battle. We had 5500 infantry and artillery, with 28 guns and 1000 cavalry. Breckinridge’s and Imboden’s force I estimated, from what we could know, at 5000 infantry and 2000 cavalry. We were about equal, and from what had happened the day before I thought that the advantage was on our side. I therefore hastened forward to New Market...where I arrived about noon, and before the enemy began his attack.⁷⁵

⁷³ Lt. Col. Scott Shipp, Commandant of VMI Cadets. “Report of Lt. Col. Scott Shipp, Battle of New Market, Virginia (15 May 1864) and Aftermath”. Lexington, VA: Virginia Military Institute Archives, URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/nmshipp.html>>. Accessed 14 August 2000. Hereafter cited as Shipp.

⁷⁴ Sigel, “Sigel in the Shenandoah Valley”.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Notice Sigel’s inaccurate count of his own guns, as well as his exaggeration of Confederate forces.

An artillery duel began the day at 0800 and lasted for two hours. By 1000 Breckinridge, based on information he obtained regarding the movement of Sigel's forces, decided to press the attack. He deployed his infantry across Shirley's Hill, moving the reserves to give the impression of great numbers. Under the direction of Breckinridge, Shipp moved the Corps of Cadets on a left flanking movement two miles south of New Market. The Cadets were to remain 250 to 300 yards behind the front lines, along with the 26th VA, constituting the reserve. Due to the poor weather, VMI's artillery section, under the command of Cadet Captain Minge, was ordered to remain with "the general artillery column on the main road and to report to Major McLaughlin."⁷⁶ (Map 5)

At 1100 the 18th CN, minus three companies still marching, arrived on scene and were immediately deployed on the brow of Manor's Hill. Contrary to Sigel's report that the Confederate attack commenced after his noon arrival, Breckinridge ordered an attack

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at 1100 with the 30th VA at the front. Behind them were the 51st VA, the 26th VA, and the Cadets; on their right, and across the pike, were the 62nd VA, the 22nd VA, the artillery, the 23rd VA, and the cavalry. Behind the portion of the 18th CN holding the Federal front line were the 123rd OH, the 1st WV, the Federal artillery minus Battery B, 5th U.S., and the remainder of the 18th CN as they arrived. Incredibly, much of Sigel's infantry were still on the march, including the 34th MA, the 12th WV, the 54th PA, the 28th OH, and the 116th OH. The constant movement and arrival of company after company, coupled with the fog of war, made command and control nearly impossible for Sigel.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Shipp, "Report of Lt. Col. Scott Shipp, Battle of New Market, Virginia (15 May 1864) and Aftermath".

⁷⁷ Whitehorne, p. 32.

The first-hand accounts of Union Colonel David H. Strother, a Virginian assigned to Sigel's staff, confirm the poor operational and tactical maneuvers, as well as the confusion of the day.

Von Kleiser's battery [30th Battery, New York] of brass ten pounders on the center too far advanced I think for the support of the main line....Sigel seemed in a state of excitement and rode here and there with Stahel and Moor, all jabbering in German. In his excitement he seemed to forget his English entirely, and the purely American portion of his staff were totally useless to him....The Rebel infantry continued to move in advance; in spite of our furious artillery fire their lines were steady and clean, no officers either mounted or on foot appearing among them. When within three hundred yards they began to yell as usual, and the musketry from both lines opened with great fury. Our men began to break immediately, running to the rear by ones, twos, and finally by streams.⁷⁸

As the Confederates advanced, withering artillery and musket fire decimated many in the 51st and 62nd VA regiments. Major Charles Semple, Breckinridge's assistant ordnance officer, quickly informed the general of the dilemma. Fearing a counterattack, he implored Breckinridge to put in the reserves, including the Cadets, but Breckinridge

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resisted. "They are only children and I cannot expose them to such a fire as they will receive on our center. Go back and tell Wharton and Echols they must contract the lines."⁷⁹ Semple soon returned; the gap was too extensive, and he again argued for reserve support. Breckinridge responded, "Put the boys in, and may God forgive me for the order."⁸⁰ (Figure 1), (Map 6)

Shipp endeavored to keep order while tying in his flanks. At one point in the advance, with the smoke cleared by a momentary shift in the wind, Shipp noticed that the ends of the Cadet line had moved ahead of the center. He gave the order "Mark time!"

⁷⁸ Strother, pp. 226-227.

⁷⁹ Gindlesperger, p. 99.

and watched as the Corps obeyed the command that had been practiced countless times on the parade ground.⁸¹ The men of the 18th CN watched in disbelief. “I never seen anything like that in the middle of a battle,’ exclaimed one of the men, shaking his head in amazement....a second soldier remarked, ‘Aw, anybody could do that. We’ve drilled like that lots a [sic] times!’ ‘Never under fire, though!’ the first man replied.”⁸²

As the VMI Cadets continued the advance, a shell exploded in the middle of Company D. Two Privates, Crockett and Jones were instantly killed, while a third, Cadet First Sergeant Cabell, clutched the ground in agony with an exposed chest.⁸³ The advance, sometimes in ankle-deep mud, continued past the Bushong House and into the orchard as the casualties mounted. (Figure 2) Shipp commented, “The fire was withering. It seemed impossible that any living creature could escape, and here we sustained our heaviest loss, a great many being wounded and numbers knocked down,

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stunned, and temporarily disabled.”⁸⁴ The intense fire eventually wounded Shipp while the Corps traversed the Bushong Orchard. “Cadet Captain Henry A. Wise, of A Co., then took command, and retained it until the end of the battle.”⁸⁵ With Von Kleiser’s 30th NY Battery in sight, upon a small hill over 300 yards away, Cadet Wise rallied the Corps of Cadets and shouted for a charge of the guns. (Map 7)

⁸⁰ Gindlesperger, p. 99.

⁸¹ Gindlesperger, p. 95.

⁸² Gindlesperger, p. 96.

⁸³ Davis, p. 122.

⁸⁴ Shipp.

⁸⁵ William Couper. “The VMI New Market Cadets”. (1933). Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives, URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/nmcouper.html>>. Accessed 14 August 2000.

A Federal Signal Corps Captain, Franklin E. Town, watched the advance of the Cadets with fascination, not realizing that his own capture was as immanent as those of the guns.

They came on steadily up the slope....Their line was as perfectly preserved as if on dress parade....Our gunners loaded at the last without stopping to sponge, and I think it would have been impossible to eject from six guns more missiles than these boys faced in their wild charge up that hill.⁸⁶

Many in the Union line did not recognize the uniform or flag of the Institute. Some thought they were a French regiment, but none doubted their bravery. "An admiring Union officer would later say, 'I never really saw discipline until I saw those boys advance!'"⁸⁷ One of the boys Captain Town watched was Cadet Private Porter Johnson, an 18 year old in Company B. Wounded in the charge, Johnson later wrote to Wise of what he remembered that afternoon.

Some of the guns at any rate were still throwing shell for I saw the one strike the ground about four or five feet directly in front of me and explode. Here I was turned clean round my gun flew over my head....One piece struck just over the heart, a great rent was torn in

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my jacket and shirt and the skin cut. I happened to have in the pocket of my jacket 2 army crackers some letters and a handkerchief, and I verily believe these broke the blow so as to save my life. But another piece struck me on the arm. My first impression was that my arm was torn off at the shoulder. I felt as if it was gone, as there was no arm there, but when I got over the daze somewhat and examined I found my left arm completely paralyzed and as black as ink from the shoulder to elbow.⁸⁸

By 1530 hours that afternoon the Federals had retreated piecemeal back to Rude's

⁸⁶ Burke Davis. "The Civil War: Strange & Fascinating Facts". (New York, New York: Wings Books, 1996), pp. 70-71.

⁸⁷ Gindlesperger, p. 112.

⁸⁸ Porter Johnson, VMI Cadet, Letter to Captain Henry A. Wise, subject: "Battle of New Market Memoir", 8 June 1909. Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives, URL:

Hill, where they hastily prepared defensive positions. Men from both forces were completely exhausted, except for the artillerymen who continued to duel. The incessant rains soaked every man and beast, and made quick movements through thick mud nearly impossible. It was at Rude's Hill that Sigel's retreating forces formed up with the 28th and 116th OH, two regiments that never reached the battle. Fearing he had little time to prepare for another Confederate attack, Sigel directed his forces to withdraw to Mount Jackson. Arriving in Mount Jackson at 1900, Sigel feared that his flanks were too exposed due to the depleted cavalry and ordered the continued withdrawal to Cedar Creek, burning the bridge over the swollen North Fork of the Shenandoah River.⁸⁹

There was some confusion and scattering of our retreating forces, but very soon order was restored....we came to the conclusion not to await another attack, for the reason that our losses were severe; that the regiments that had sustained the brunt of the fight were nearly out of ammunition and would have no time to receive it from the train, which was in the rear, beyond the bridge; that our position was not a good one, being commanded by the enemy's guns, posted on the hill in front of our left; and that in case of defeat we could not cross the swollen river, except by the bridge.⁹⁰

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Lieutenant Colonel Shipp's report summarized the day as follows:

The engagement closed at 6:30 p.m. The Cadets did their duty, as the long list of casualties will attest...It had rained almost incessantly during the battle, and at its termination the Cadets were well-nigh exhausted. Wet, hungry, and many of them shoeless—for they had lost their shoes and socks in the deep mud through which it was necessary to march—they bore their hardships with the uncomplaining resignation which characterizes the true soldier.⁹¹

Of the 257 VMI Cadets who stepped onto that battlefield, 10 were killed and 47

⁸⁹ Sigel. <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/ms002pj.html>>. Accessed 14 August 2000.

⁹⁰ Sigel.

⁹¹ Shipp.

were wounded. Company B, one of four VMI companies that day, lost 5 killed and 13 wounded. Cadet Private Franklin Graham Gibson, Company B, age 19, was wounded seven times in this battle. Also of note was the wounding of General Imboden's son, Cadet Private Jacob P. Imboden, Company D, age 17. Confederate casualties were 50 killed, 480 wounded, and 10 missing for a total of 540. Union casualties were 96 killed, 520 wounded, and 225 missing for a total of 841.⁹²

Sigel, reluctant to accept defeat or any blame for retreating, sent reports back that emphasized how badly he had been outnumbered. Some of Sigel's reports left doubt about who had been the victor, prompting "the following New York *Tribune* headline of May 18, 1864: SIGEL WHIPS THE REBELS AT NEW MARKET."⁹³ David H. Strother, Colonel, USA, summed up the Union's performance at New Market with hatred and contempt for General Sigel:

The campaign was conducted miserably by Sigel. In the first place he sent a brigade under Moor with some cavalry some twenty miles ahead of his main body, so far as to be entirely out of supporting distance. When he went forward at length to support this force he joined battle with his troops strung out along the road for fourteen miles. He chose a weak

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position to receive Breckinridge's attack when he might have fallen back to Rude's Hill, which he could have held with artillery alone until his troops were all up and rested. During the battle he was talking German and fiddling with the artillery instead of looking to the general position of the army, and the infantry is after all the decisive arm. I came to the conclusion that Sigel is merely a book soldier acquainted with the techniques of the art of war but having no capacity to fight with troops in the field. For the rest he is given to detail and littleness and without comprehensiveness and is entirely below the commission which he bears. I had hoped when he first came into the department that he was at least honest and enthusiastic for an idea, but I think now he was an adventurer and speculator, venal and intriguing. We can afford to lose such a battle

⁹² Gindlesperger, pp. 148-153.

⁹³ Gindlesperger, p. 140.

as New Market to get rid of such a mistake as Major General Sigel.⁹⁴

The Confederate victory was one marked by determined southern resistance, the valor of VMI's youth, and the simple good fortune of inept Union leadership. The southern celebration would not last a month before Federal forces under a new commander threatened the valley once again. That commander was General David Hunter, Sigel's replacement, and he would not make the same mistakes as his predecessor.

THE BURNING

The General asked my opinion in regard to the destruction of the Institute. I told him I looked upon it as a most dangerous establishment where treason was systematically taught.

--Colonel David Hunter Strother, USA, 12 June 1864⁹⁵

On May 21st, six days after the Union's defeat at New Market, Sigel was replaced

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"by the experienced but not very talented regular officer, Major General David Hunter, who was at hand and without a command."⁹⁶ With a major portion of the Confederate forces moving east to support Richmond, Grant ordered Hunter to destroy supply and support structures throughout the Shenandoah Valley, with the Virginia Central Railroad and Staunton as the primary targets.

⁹⁴ Strother, pp. 229-230. "Strother's evaluation of Sigel compares with Halleck's remark to Grant on May 17: 'He is already in full retreat on Strasburg. If you expect anything from him you will be mistaken. He will do nothing but run. He never did anything else.'", note on p. 230.

⁹⁵ Strother, pp. 254-255.

⁹⁶ Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 575. Hereafter cited as Hattaway and Jones.

Hunter's advance was rapid and calculated; after a successful engagement at Piedmont on 5 June, the Federal forces were able to occupy Staunton, without opposition, the next day. Large quantities of commissary and ordnance stores were either decimated or distributed among the Union soldiers, and all depots, railroad bridges, workshops, and factories were destroyed. Crook and Averell's 10,000-man force, having destroyed the Virginia Central Railroad west of town, joined Hunter's command on the 8th of June, increasing the Federal army to nearly 18,000 strong.⁹⁷

After resting and reorganizing, Hunter's force departed on 10 June and pressed south toward Lexington. Minor Confederate forces, lead by General McCausland, Colonel William L. Jackson, and VMI's General Smith, continued their efforts at delaying the Union advance, but they had little success. On 11 June, Hunter's army occupied Lexington; the town and its two colleges were at the mercy of a vengeful and mighty foe.⁹⁸ (Figure 3)

The destruction levied on Staunton was repeated in Lexington. Mills, furnaces,

storehouses, granaries, and any machinery that could be found were destroyed. The Institute was ransacked and burned, save the Superintendent's house, which Hunter utilized as his headquarters. Washington College was spared of destruction after pleas from the trustees for the Founding Father won favor with Hunter. But little else was sparred; "the destruction to private property alone amounted to more than \$2,000,000."⁹⁹

⁹⁷ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.* Series I, Volume 37, Part 1, p. 70. URL:

<<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/orhr1.html>>. Accessed 17 December 2000.

⁹⁸ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.* Series I, Volume 37, Part 1, p. 70. URL:

<<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/orhr2.html>>. Accessed 17 December 2000.

⁹⁹ Woodward, Jr., p. 135.

An interesting account from an eyewitness, Private J. O. Humphreys of the 1st Ohio Artillery, was written on some empty pages of a book he found at VMI. That book turned out to be the *Order Book for the VMI Corps of Cadets*, and it contains a wealth of administrative information regarding Cadet life from 17 January 1862 through 7 May 1864.

June 11th—Marched to Lexington where the enemy disputed our passage of North River with artillery and sharp shooting, which was soon stopped, and we entered the town. Geo. W. Tank of our company was killed, no other loss was sustained except three killed and four wounded in the 36th Ohio. Distance 13 miles.

June 12th—Remaining at Lexington we had an opportunity of looking about the town where the great Rebel General Stonewall Jackson lived and is buried. Here are the Virginia Military Institute and Washington College. Both the Institute and the College were well rummaged by the boys, and the clothing of the cadets and the libraries of the two institutions received much attention. Indeed it is doubtful if ever an army was so devoted to literature as was our Corps. A quantity of ordnance and the Q.M. stores were found at the Institute which were burned with the buildings. Drunken Rebel ex-Governor John Letcher's house was also burned—a very appropriate and fitting way of doing things to such men. Stonewall's grave is unmarked except by a pine flagstaff, which serves to show where a great, brave and good enemy sleeps.¹⁰⁰

The following is a segment of the report from VMI's Superintendent, General

Smith, to the VMI Board of Visitors and authorities in Richmond. Realizing the futility at defending the Institute against overwhelming odds, Smith retreated the Corps to Balcony Falls, then Lynchburg, saving many Cadet lives. Although he was prepared to utilize the Corps in a matched battle, like at New Market, Smith knew that Lexington and the Institute would eventually be occupied. His relocation of valuable Institute property,

¹⁰⁰ "Shenandoah Valley, April-July 1864," *J. O. Humphreys Diary, Part 2, 1st Independent Battery Ohio Artillery*. (Lexington, Virginia: A Civil War Collection from the VMI Archives). URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/obdiary.html>>. Accessed 17 December 2000.

given to Washington College and private citizens in Lexington, clearly shows that he was pessimistic about the Institute's future prior to Hunter's arrival.

Head Quarters Virginia Mil. Institute
Lynchburg, Va.
June 17, 1864

Maj. Gen. Wm. H. Richardson, A.G.

General:

....On Friday [June 10] intelligence was brought to me from Gen. McCausland that the enemy in strong force, estimated by him at 10,000, was advancing on the two main roads from Staunton to Lexington, and by 7 P.M. his command had been driven back from 1 ½ miles of Staunton to Cameron's farm 2 miles from Lexington. I had a very long interview with Gen. McCausland that night, and said to him, that if, with the support of the Corps of Cadets, he could make an effective resistance, and save the town of Lexington, and with it, the public property placed in charge of the Corps of Cadets at the V.M. Institute, I was prepared to make any sacrifice necessary to this end. But if a sanguinary resistance in front of Lexington could only retard the advance of the enemy a few hours, involving thereby a useless sacrifice of life and endangering the capture of the cadets by a flank movement on either side of the town, I was not willing to make such a sacrifice or to run such a risk.

Gen. McCausland did not think he could hold the position without support from Gen. Breckinridge, but he deeming it important to retard the advance of the enemy, I determined to hold the cadets on their [ground or guard], ready to give support if required, upon the conditions above specified, with the understanding that [early] notice should be given [for them] to withdraw when resistance was no longer effectual....

...Gen. McCausland having destroyed the bridge over the North River, planted a section of artillery on the Magazine hill, and occupied the adjacent hills south of the river with sharpshooters. Firing soon commenced, and an active artillery fire was kept up for several hours, without loss to our side. By 1 o'clock it became evident that the enemy had crossed above Leyburn's mills, and was advancing by Kerr's Creek. I deemed it prudent at once to withdraw and gave orders to Lt. Col. Ship [sic] to move by the Fair Grounds road and cross the N. River by the bridge at its mouth, and encamp near Balcony Falls that night. At 2 ½ P.M. Gen. McCausland withdrew with his command & proceeded by the

Fancy Hill road towards Buchanan, strongly pressed by the enemy who entered the town at 3 ½ P.M.

As guard & protection to the citizens who were moving their servants & stock by the James River, to Bedford and Amherst, I determined to hold the pass at the Balcony Falls. Effective protection was thus given to a large amount of private property, while I was not without the hope that withdrawal of the enemy from Lexington might enable us to return. A raid, however, upon Amherst, and the advance of Averill [*sic*] & pursuit of McCausland into Bedford, made it unsafe to remain above Waugh's Ferry, and Wednesday I gave orders to retire towards Lynchburg. We met a dispatch on the way from Gen. Breckinridge directing the movement, and at 8 A.M. on Thursday the 16th we arrived in Lynchburg, and I immediately reported by telegraph to your office, for the orders of the Governor & Board of Visitors.

On Sunday the 12 June all the public buildings of the Institute were burnt by the order of Major General D. Hunter, except my quarters and the quarters of the ordnance Sergeant. The peculiar condition of my daughter, with a child only 48 hours old, induced my wife to throw herself upon the courtesy of the commanding General. The appeal was not in vain, and I acknowledge with pleasure, this relaxation of the devastation which was unsparingly applied to every species of property owned by the state at the V.Mil. [*sic*] Institute, which we were unable to remove. The beautiful statue of Washington cast by Hubard from Houdon's model, was removed.

....The most valuable part of the Library and Philosophical apparatus with the paintings had been removed to Washington College and to the houses of friends. I have not heard whether they had been removed or destroyed. The residence of Governor Letcher, with all his effects, was destroyed, and I have heard [the] house was searched and robbed of the essentials of life, especially of flour & meat.

In a time of war it was not to be expected that the Va. Mil. Institute should

escape the effects of the devastations which has visited by fire and rapine the fairest portions of our beloved commonwealth, and the apprehension of its capture became more serious as the necessities of the hour withdrew from our support, the army [that] had defended the Valley of Va. It was a painful contemplation to all associated with the Va. Mil. Institute, to know, that the buildings erected by the liberality of the state for the use of her favored military school, were in the hands of the spoiler and when the clouds of heaven reflected the conflagration lighted by the torch of the invader, every eye was moistened that the home of the V.M.I. cadet was gone!

But the Virginia Military Institute still proudly and defiantly stands. The brick and mortar which gave a temporary shelter to her nurturing sons, while they were buckling on the armor for the conflict, constituted not the Military school of Virginia. Thank God, that still lives. The Governor—its Board of Visitors—its Professors—its cadets—still remain in organized being, ready to work—and able to send forth, year by year, its alumni, to fill up the ranks of those who have fallen in the deadly struggle....

I await the order of the Board of Visitors.

I remain, General, Very Resp. /signed/Francis H. Smith, Supt.¹⁰¹

The best, and probably most accurate, account of VMI's destruction comes from the diary of Colonel Strother, assigned to Hunter's staff. His detest of the southern rebellion and the Institute's involvement prompted his lengthy writing of the day's events.

...Throughout the pamphlet literature of the school, addresses, speeches, and circulars, we saw one prominent and leading idea—that the Cadet in receiving this education from the sovereign state owed allegiance and military service to the state alone, and if he should be called to serve the Government of the United States he could only do so by the order and permission of the sovereign state of Virginia...This was the great paramount reason for its destruction by fire.

There were military reasons besides. The professors and cadets had taken

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the field against government troops, as an organized corps. The buildings had been used as a Rebel arsenal and recently as a fortress...The order was given to fire the building and all the houses and outbuildings.

As this order was executed, the plunderers came running out, their arms full of spoils. One fellow had a stuffed gannet from the museum of natural history; others had the high-topped hats of cadet officers, and most of them were loaded with the most useless and impracticable articles. Lieutenant Meigs came out with fine mathematical instruments, and Dr. Patton followed with a beautiful human skeleton. Some of the officers

¹⁰¹ Francis H. Smith, General, Virginia Militia, Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute; letter to Maj. Gen. William H. Richardson, 17 June 1864. Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives. URL: <http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/cwhr_ltr.html>. Accessed 17 December 2000. Note: Six paragraphs of the letter are not included, due to the length of the letter, but the main aspects of the situation have been retained.

brought out some beautifully illustrated volumes of natural history which they presented to me. I, however, felt averse to taking anything and left them at Professor Smith's....

....I suggested to the General that the bronze statue of Washington in front of the Institute should be sent to Wheeling by train as a trophy for West Virginia. Meigs, who undertook the boxing and moving of it, insisted that it should go to West Point, and as I was indifferent as to what was its destination I consented readily. The fire had not injured the statue in the least, and as I looked at the dignified and noble countenance I felt indignant that this effigy should be left to adorn a country whose inhabitants were striving to destroy a government which he founded....¹⁰²

Hunter's advance continued toward Lynchburg, and on 17 June he met heavy Confederate defenses, which consisted of General Jubal Early's Second Corps, the local militia, and the VMI Cadets, who were assigned to duties in the rear. Overextended, Hunter was not able to prevail, and on 19 June he retreated his army back to West Virginia with Early's cavalry in pursuit. Early remained in the Shenandoah Valley, endeavoring to clear Federal forces. The Cadets remained in Lynchburg, caring for the wounded and burying the dead. The extensive damage of the Institute made it pointless to remain in Lexington; therefore, the decision was made for the Corps to march to Richmond. It would be their final march of the war.¹⁰³

THE DEFENSE OF RICHMOND

We relied on the grand old Army of Northern Virginia to retrieve the reverses of the last few months, and to lift the Confederacy from the “Slough of Despond.”

--Sallie Brock Putnam, Richmond Resident, January, 1865¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Strother, pp. 255-257. Note: The statue of George Washington was returned to the Institute in 1866.

¹⁰³ Margaretta Barton Colt, *Defend the Valley*. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 318. Hereafter cited as Colt.

¹⁰⁴ Putnam, p. 351.

Throughout the winter and spring of 1864-1865, Federal troops swarmed in all regions of the U. S. The strategy of annihilating the Confederate armies, once the preferred strategy of President Lincoln and his Union Generals, was replaced with the strategy of resource deprivation. Developed and implemented by Generals Grant, Sherman, McClellan, Sheridan, and Halleck, this strategy sought to deprive the Confederacy of vital logistical necessities, such as supplies, weapons, and recruits. Railroads, depots, factories, and water routes were all primary targets.¹⁰⁵

The Confederate capital of Richmond, a heavily fortified communications hub, had always been a major Federal target for destruction of its resources, leadership, and symbolism. In order to reunite the seceded states after the war's end, President Lincoln wished to avoid a siege of Richmond, but Grant's forces, in unison with Sheridan's forces, would have to battle those Confederate forces that constituted the city's perimeter defense. The Cadets from VMI were not a part of that defense. Instead, after bitter debate, they were assigned duties within the city itself.

That debate surfaced on 3 October 1864 when Special Order 102 was published by the Headquarters Reserve Forces in Richmond. This Special Order required all Cadets

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who were 17 and older to report to Camp Lee for assignments in the field. It also invited those Cadets under the age of 17 to report for such duties, should they desire to serve the state. Smith's 8 October response was heated and direct.

...The authority exercised by the Confederate authorities over the cadets of the Virginia Military Institute under these orders is directly in conflict with the instructions which I have received from the Governor of Virginia

¹⁰⁵ Hattaway and Jones, pp. 683-690.

under your order of October 14, 1862, and of the special order given to me personally by His Excellency Governor Smith in June, 1864. I extract the closing paragraph of your order of October 14, 1862.

The Governor, in view of all these important facts, feel it to be incumbent upon him to direct the superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute not to surrender any cadet who may be claimed as a conscript by the Confederate authority until the constitutionality of the act of Congress called the conscript law shall have been tested, the legislative will of the State ascertained, or until further orders.

The authorities of the Virginia Military Institute have no disposition to withhold the cadets from the service of the country in this hour of its peril and need. They have promptly sanctioned their service without stint and at costly sacrifice of blood to the cause of this country. But the State through its military institute stands as a guardian, in her sovereign capacity, to these young soldiers, and it seems to be but just and proper that when their services are required in the field of battle they should be sent forth under the authority of the State whose servants they are, that the care and protection which have been assumed and promised to them may be rendered. Where thus rallied around the standard of the country, they will present an organized Virginia command, which may be extended to embrace many others who would promptly rally around the Virginia Military Institute, and by their efficiency render substantial service, without detriment to their morals.

If Special Order, No. 102, be persisted in the organization of [*sic*] the Military Institute will be destroyed, and I apprehend the worst consequences to the individual members of the institute.

I remain, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
Francis H. Smith, Brevet Major-General and Superintendent.¹⁰⁶

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Smith's correspondence prompted Governor Smith to rescind the order, allowing the Cadets to resume their studies at the Richmond almshouse that December, while rendering assistance, along with Ewell's irregulars, with the construction of fortifications. These records exemplify the desperation of the city and the Confederacy. They also

¹⁰⁶ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series IV, Volume 3, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1900), pp. 722-723.

reflect positively on Smith's resolve to protect the Cadets from the futility of sacrifice without purpose.¹⁰⁷

By the spring of 1865, Richmond had become a city of disrepair. Provisions and supplies were extremely difficult to obtain and outrageously expensive. The Union's blockades and destruction of railroads, coupled with a population that had quadrupled since 1860, added to the frustration and despair of a city contemplating defeat. The lamentations of the people within Richmond's defenses is accurately described through the diaries of Sallie Brock Putnam, a resident who kept detailed records of the war's events and its effects throughout the state of Virginia.

The New Year was ushered in with no better prospects. If there was no foreboding of the coming wreck of our coveted independence, we could at best only look forward to an indefinite continuation of the dire evils which had shrouded our land in sorrow and misery. Day by day our wants and privations increased....

In addition to our other miseries, robberies were fearfully on the increase. The fortunate possessor of a well-stocked larder or coal house was in constant danger from burglary. It finally became an almost universal fashion in Richmond to permit 'every day to take care of itself.'¹⁰⁸

The Confederacy's last hopes for survival died with the loss of Petersburg on 2 April 1865 and Lee's withdrawal the following day. Sheridan and Grant expertly flanked the exhausted southern forces on numerous occasions, forcing the Rebels to retreat

throughout the cold nights in order to avoid being surrounded. On the morning of 2 April, the Cadets were again called upon to render assistance. Moving to the Richmond suburb of Rocketts, they occupied the rifle pits vacated by troops from Longstreet's Corps, who had moved to Petersburg to strengthen Confederate positions depleted after

¹⁰⁷ Furgurson, p. 318.

the battle of Five Forks. Pickets discovered that the enemy, one quarter of a mile to their front, was a division of black soldiers. Smith later wrote, “When the tremendous cheering of the enemy was heard, from time to time, we were sure our time had come. If anything more uncomfortable than this waiting could have been found, we didn’t care to experience it.”¹⁰⁹

That afternoon the Cadets were relieved by a squadron of dismounted cavalry. Their return to Richmond was welcomed by chaos; fires loomed everywhere as the populace crowded the streets, all fleeing the city after orders to evacuate were announced by the authorities. Smith, doubting the Corps of Cadets’ ability to reach an organized Confederate force, “disbanded the corps and directed each cadet to escape as best he could.”¹¹⁰ One week later, General Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse.

The rebellion against the United States Government had finally been defeated. The difficult task of reconstruction and reconciliation fell upon President Lincoln and, following Lincoln’s assassination on 14 April 1865, President Andrew Johnson. The war had changed the country, both physically and emotionally, but unity and renewal would be achieved over time. The war had changed VMI too. Its buildings in ruin and the Corps of Cadets disbanded, Smith now faced the challenge of reviving what many saw as

a symbol of violent rebellion.

Through perseverance and sacrifice, Smith was able to reopen the Institute on 16 October 1865. Eighteen Cadets were admitted for the fall term, and several distinguished

¹⁰⁸ Putnam, p. 341.

¹⁰⁹ Conrad, p. 142.

¹¹⁰ Conrad, p. 142.

faculty members were hired, including George Washington Curtis Lee, son of Robert E. Lee, Captain John Mercer Brooke, one of the designers of the ironclad *Virginia*, and Matthew Fontaine Maury, recognized as the founder of oceanography. Smith remained VMI's Superintendent until his retirement in 1889; he died one year later. Scott Shipp returned to the Institute as its Commandant of Cadets, and in 1889 became VMI's second Superintendent until his death in 1917. Both men are widely recognized as the backbone of the Institute's present-day success.¹¹¹

CONCLUSION

War sometimes separates those who were once friends—Civil War always does.

--General Francis H. Smith, CSA, Superintendent
of the Virginia Military Institute, 1839-1889.¹¹²

The American Civil War was a dark period in the history of the United States of America. Rebellion by the Confederate States undermined the heart of the Union and the soul of the Constitution of the United States. Four years of armed conflict, fought

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between fellow Americans, devastated the country and the population; it also tested the resolve of the Federal Government to hold the country together. Virginia played a key role in that rebellion; her citizens, her lands, and her capital were symbols for all within

¹¹¹ Conrad, p. 161-165.

¹¹² General Francis H. Smith, Virginia Militia, Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, and General George W. Cullum, USA, Superintendent of the United States Military Academy, letters to each other, 13-16 November 1865. (Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives), URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/cwcullum.html>>. Accessed 16 December 2000.

the Confederate States of America. The Virginia Military Institute was no different. It symbolized the military power, resolve, and professionalism of the state, while preparing tomorrow's leaders for state service, either civil or military.

As one of the leading military schools in the country, with over 20 years of commendable educational service prior to 1861, VMI was considered a prime source for men with leadership skills and military experience. A majority of men from Virginia, and from other southern states after 1860, paid high tuition fees at VMI in order to acquire the discipline, military training, and leadership skills necessary for command, and perhaps survival. Although the Institute was renowned for producing excellent citizen-soldiers, many of whom went on to become exemplary military officers, its role on the battlefield was limited, particularly when one considers the number of battles waged on Virginia's soil.

During the four years of civil war, the Corps of Cadets at the Virginia Military Institute supported the state and the Confederacy in numerous ways. The first was by defending the Institute, the town of Lexington, and the state's property, particularly the arsenal, while pursuing an education that focused on developing military leaders. The second was through service to the state, which included marching in parades, crowd control, guard duty abroad, and the training of recruits. The third was in secondary duties during campaigns in the Shenandoah Valley, including logistical replenishment, guarding

supplies, caring for the wounded, and burial details or burial ceremonies. The fourth was as a reserve component, capable of replacing depleted units to ensure victory, but only as

a last resort. Lastly, VMI's support came in the defense of Richmond, the Confederate capital, as a last line of defense.

Arguments against the use of VMI's Cadets, voiced by the Superintendent, General Smith, the school's Board of Visitors, some parents, and occasionally by the governor, help explain the reasons for their limited usage. First, tuition-paying parents wanted to educate their sons and prepare them for military service as officers. Some parents wanted their child to avoid the war, if possible, insisting that the school's mission was to provide the discipline and knowledge that their son lacked. Second, the Institute was ultimately responsible for the welfare of her pupils, but neither the school nor the state had the authority to place these youths in harm's way, particularly those under 18 years of age. Third, service in the Confederacy as officers was more beneficial than as a Cadet, especially as the war became a war of attrition. Fourth, Confederate President Davis and the southern judicial courts never addressed the constitutionality of the Confederate Congress Conscription Act, which was initially questioned by the Governor of Virginia. Finally, the use of Cadets in battle was viewed as a senseless sacrifice of youth and tomorrow's leadership.

Service to Virginia as a Cadet, and to the individual's home state upon graduation, enhanced the educational experience of the students by giving them direct exposure to realities not found in textbooks. Historically, such hands-on experience, coupled with some form of military/disciplinary training, has had great success educating

and preparing men, and women, for leadership roles as citizen-soldiers. Today's national and state-supported military institutions, such as West Point, the Naval Academy, the

Citadel, and VMI, utilize many of the same methods and techniques to train their pupils that were prevalent in the 19th century. Such institutions do not depend upon war for success, nor do they necessarily benefit from it; war can be the destructor of such places, for it disrupts and destroys regular societal patterns, forces nations to focus only on the training of soldiers and sailors, and depletes countless numbers in the prime of their life—sometimes whole generations. Such a prolonged war, fiercely fought on American soil, had a devastating impact on the United States, particularly Virginia. Participation by the VMI Cadets, it can be argued, was unavoidable.

The limited involvement of the Virginia Military Institute and its Corps of Cadets throughout the American Civil War is a testament to the trials and tribulations that afflicted Virginia and the Confederacy. Social, economic, and political pressures continuously clashed with issues of morality and jurisprudence; all those who had a hand in deciding the level of Cadet participation, regardless of the date or assignment, must have struggled with the basic issue of right from wrong. War is a terrible event for all who experience it, particularly for the vanquished. Desperate times often lead to desperate measures, which ultimately leads to senseless death. By stark contrast, the judgment and common-sense of men like Smith and Shipp protected the welfare of the Cadets, allowing them to serve with honor and pride, while ensuring their survival for the good of Virginia and the United States of America.

APPENDIX A

“Died on the Field of Honor”

Ten Virginia Military Institute Cadets were killed in battle, or died later as a result of wounds, which took place at New Market, Virginia on 15 May 1864. Although other Cadets were killed during the four-year American conflict, some who were still a part of the Corps of Cadets and many who had resigned for voluntary enlistment, the ten Cadets listed below were the only ones who perished as a result of the Institute's direct involvement in battle.

- **Samuel Francis Atwill.** “Born 1846, Westmoreland Co., VA; Cadet Corporal, Co. A; Died 20 July 1864, in Staunton, VA. ‘Struck in the calf of the leg, his wound was considered severe, though not dangerous...he was attacked with lockjaw, and died in the most excruciating agony.’”
- **William Henry Cabell.** “Born 1845, Richmond, VA; [Cadet] First Sergeant, Co. D; killed in battle. ‘...dead in the path of the [cadet] charge, his head pierced and torn by the fragment of a shell.’”
- **Charles Gay Crockett.** “Born 1846, near Wytheville, VA; Cadet Private, Co. D; died on the battlefield, ‘pierced through the heart with a bullet.’”
- **Alva Curtis Hartsfield.** “Born 1844, Wake Co., NC; [Cadet] Private, Co. B; died 26 June 1864, Petersburg, VA.”
- **Luther Cary Haynes.** “Born 1845; Cadet Private, Co. C; died 15 June 1864 in [a] hospital at Richmond, VA”
- **Thomas Garland Jefferson.** “Born 1847, Amelia Co., VA; Cadet Private, Co. B; died 18 May 1864.”
- **Henry Jenner Jones.** “Born 1847, King William Co., VA; Cadet Private, Co. D; died in battle, killed instantly by the explosion of a shell.”
- **William Hugh McDowell.** “Born 1846, Iredell Co., NC; Cadet Private, Co. B; died in battle.”
- **Jaqueline Beverly Stanard.** “Born ca. 1844, Orange Co., VA; Cadet Private, Co. B; died in battle.”
- **Joseph Christopher Wheelwright.** “Born 1846, Westmoreland Co., VA; Cadet Private, Co. C; died 2 June 1864.”¹¹³

A Friendship Lost

¹¹³ William Couper. “The VMI New Market Cadets”. (1933). Lexington, VA: Virginia Military Institute Archives, URL: <http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/nmdied.html>. Accessed 14 August 2000.

“A few months after the end of the Civil War, two old friends and West Point classmates—one a southerner and the other from the north—exchanged letters. The correspondents were General Francis H. Smith, Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, and General George W. Cullum, Superintendent of the United States Military Academy. Both were members of the USMA Class of 1833. Once close friends, the war had made them enemies. In November 1865, Smith contacted Cullum, hoping to visit West Point and renew the ties that had been broken by war.”¹¹⁴

The following letters personify the sentiments of northerners and southerners throughout the United States following the conclusion of hostilities. The destruction of VMI by General Hunter was extremely thorough; it required great efforts by General Smith, the Board of Visitors, and the state of Virginia in order to restore the necessary resources and materials required of an institution promoting higher education.



Smith



Cullum

**Smith to Cullum.
New York. 13 November 1865**

‘General-

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War sometimes separates those who were once friends—Civil War always does. But peace has its healing and restoring qualities. I am now here on business connected with the Institution to which 26 years of my life have been devoted, and my purpose is, in this connection, to visit West Point. I have deemed it proper to advise you of this intention

¹¹⁴ General Francis H. Smith, Virginia Militia, Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, and General George W. Cullum, USA, Superintendent of the United States Military Academy, letters to each other, 13-16 November 1865. (Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives), URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/cwcullum.html>>. Accessed 16 December 2000.

and a reply will reach me at our mutual friend D. Van Nostrand, 191 Broadway, New York. I remain, General, very truly, F.H.S.'

Cullum to Smith.
14 November 1865

'We were once attached friends, and now I have no unkind feeling towards you; but as the Superintendent of the U. S. Military Academy, I cannot at present, with a proper sense of the responsibilities of my position, receive one who is at the head of an institution which has done so much for the injury of my country.'

Smith to Cullum
16 November 1865

'My proposed visit to West Point was in connection with the interests of scientific education in Virginia. As the Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, I am now engaged in an effort to restore the ruin which war has brought upon it. This has involved the total destruction of our Library, Philosophical and Chemical apparatus. I had hoped that the restored relations of my state, and its Institutions, to the government of the United States, would have removed every barrier to a free communication with the U. S. Military Academy, and thus have afforded me some facilities in aid of my work. The courtesy extended to me by scientific gentlemen in Washington City, justified the belief, aside from other considerations, that the National School of the Army, at which I had been educated with you as a classmate, would have extended to me a like reception.

I regret that your view of your public duty closes the door of the Academy to me. I shall return to Virginia, with no unkind feeling towards you, but pained that I have to add your letter to the record of losses, which war has brought upon our common country....Again we have a common country, not the same—but another—and this truth finds a painful illustration in the fact, that occupying as I do, such personal and official relations towards you, the privilege is denied me by you, of visiting an Institution, in whose history and operations I have a common interest with yourself.'¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

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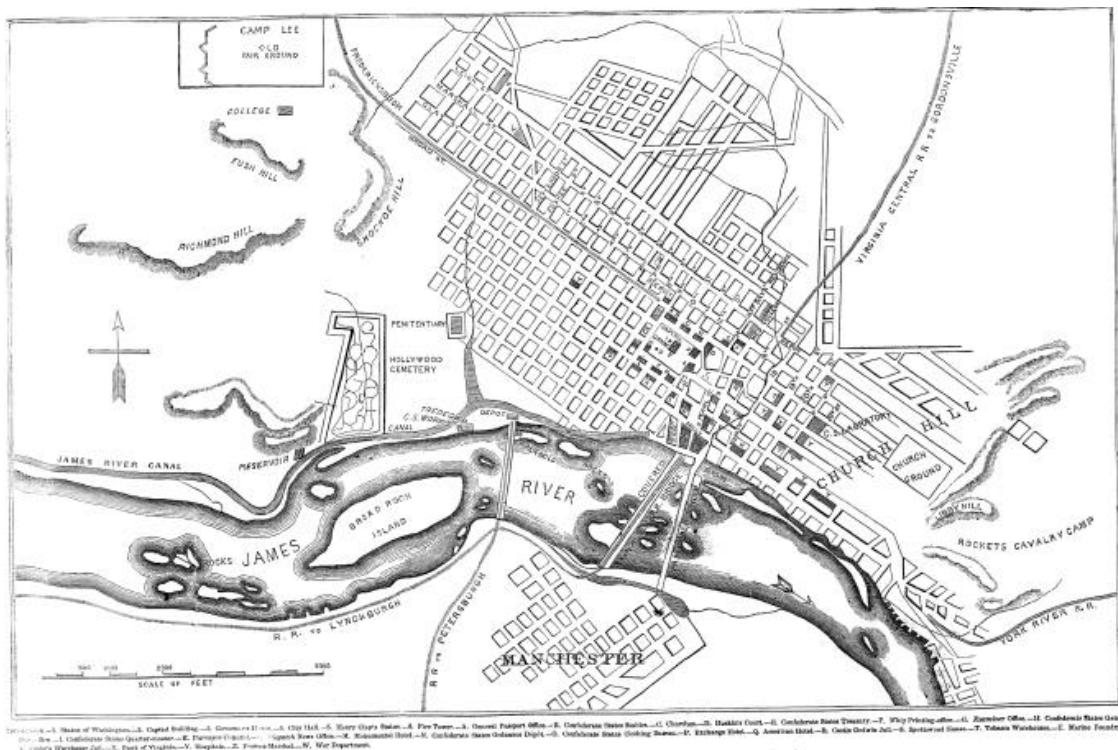
Figure 1. New Market Battle Painting

Source: “New Market Battle Painting,” (Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives). URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/painting.html>>. Accessed 24 December 2000. Note: “This painting, the work of Benjamin West Clinedinst, depicts the charge of the VMI Corps of Cadets in the Battle of New Market on May 15, 1864. Measuring 18 x 23 feet, it is located in VMI’s Jackson Memorial Hall. It was unveiled in 1914. The artist was an 1880 graduate of the Institute.”



Figure 2. The Bushong House, New Market, Virginia

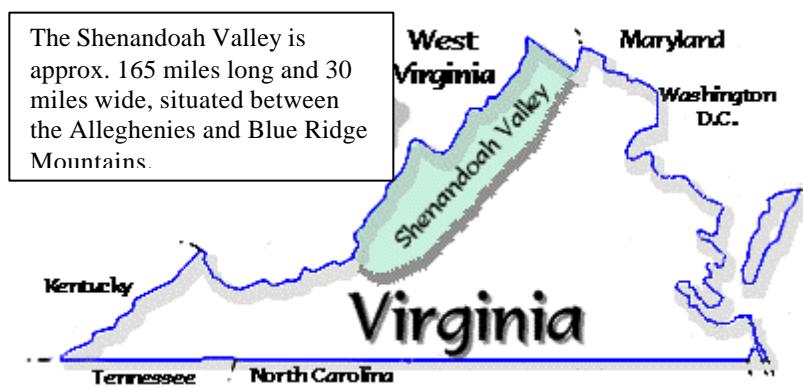
Source: “Bushong House,” (Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives). URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~arcimage/bushong.jpg>>. Accessed 24 December 2000.



Map 1. Map of Richmond, Virginia

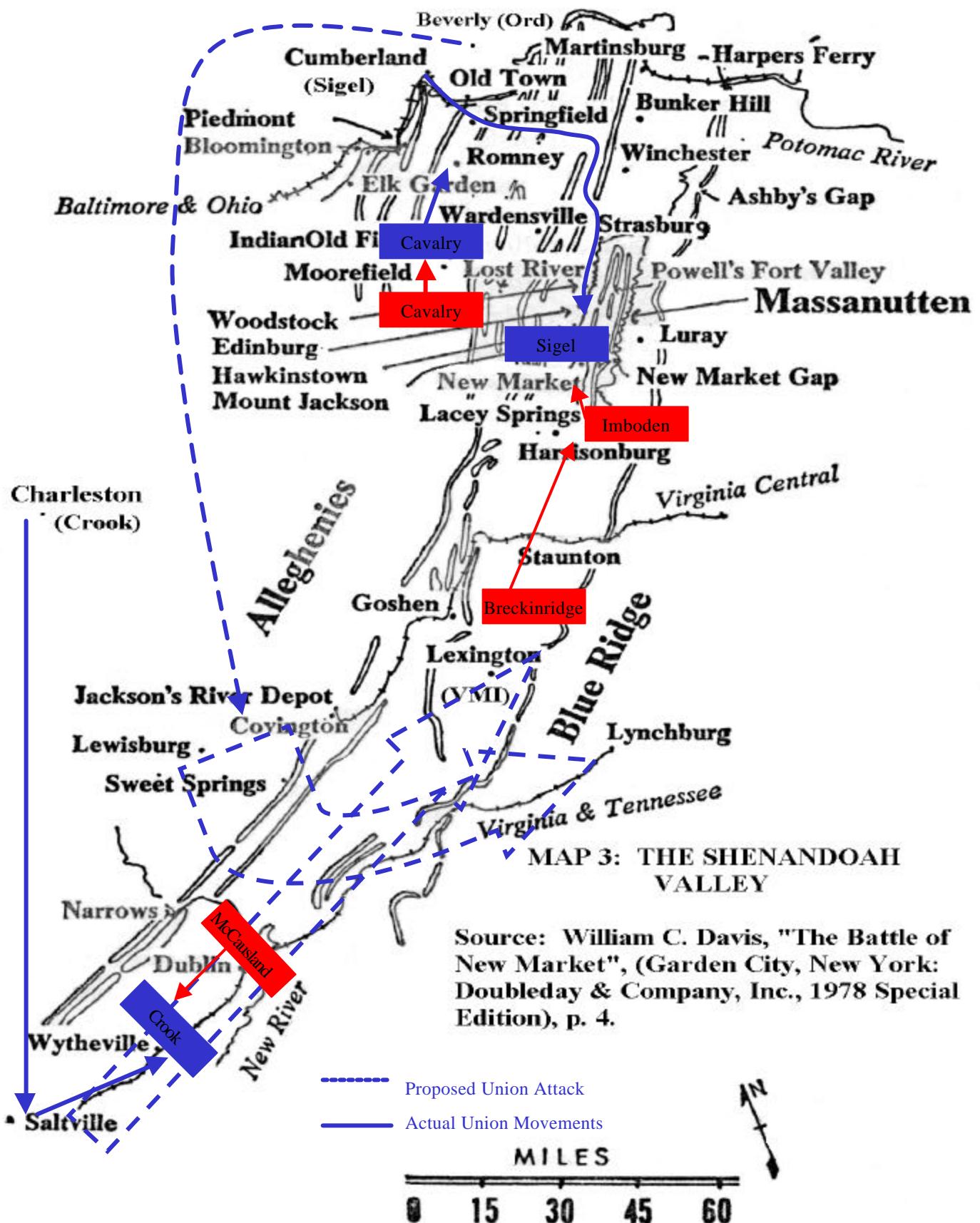
Source: "The City of Richmond, Virginia—Drawn by a Refugee just Escaped from Secession." *Harpers Weekly*, August 9, 1862. URL:

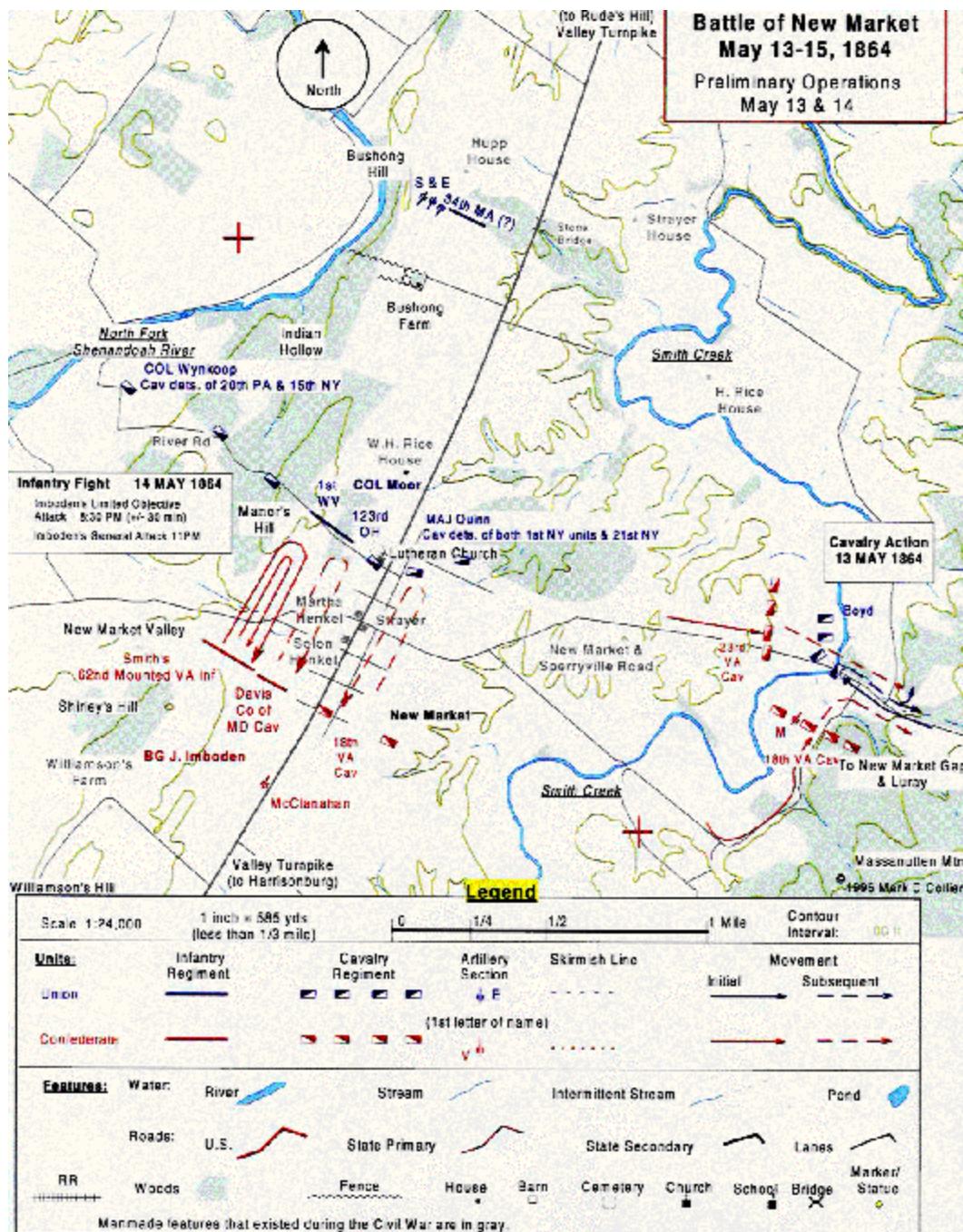
<http://www.mdgorman.com/harpers_weekly_map.htm>. Accessed 20 December 2000.



Map 2. Map of Shenandoah Valley, Virginia

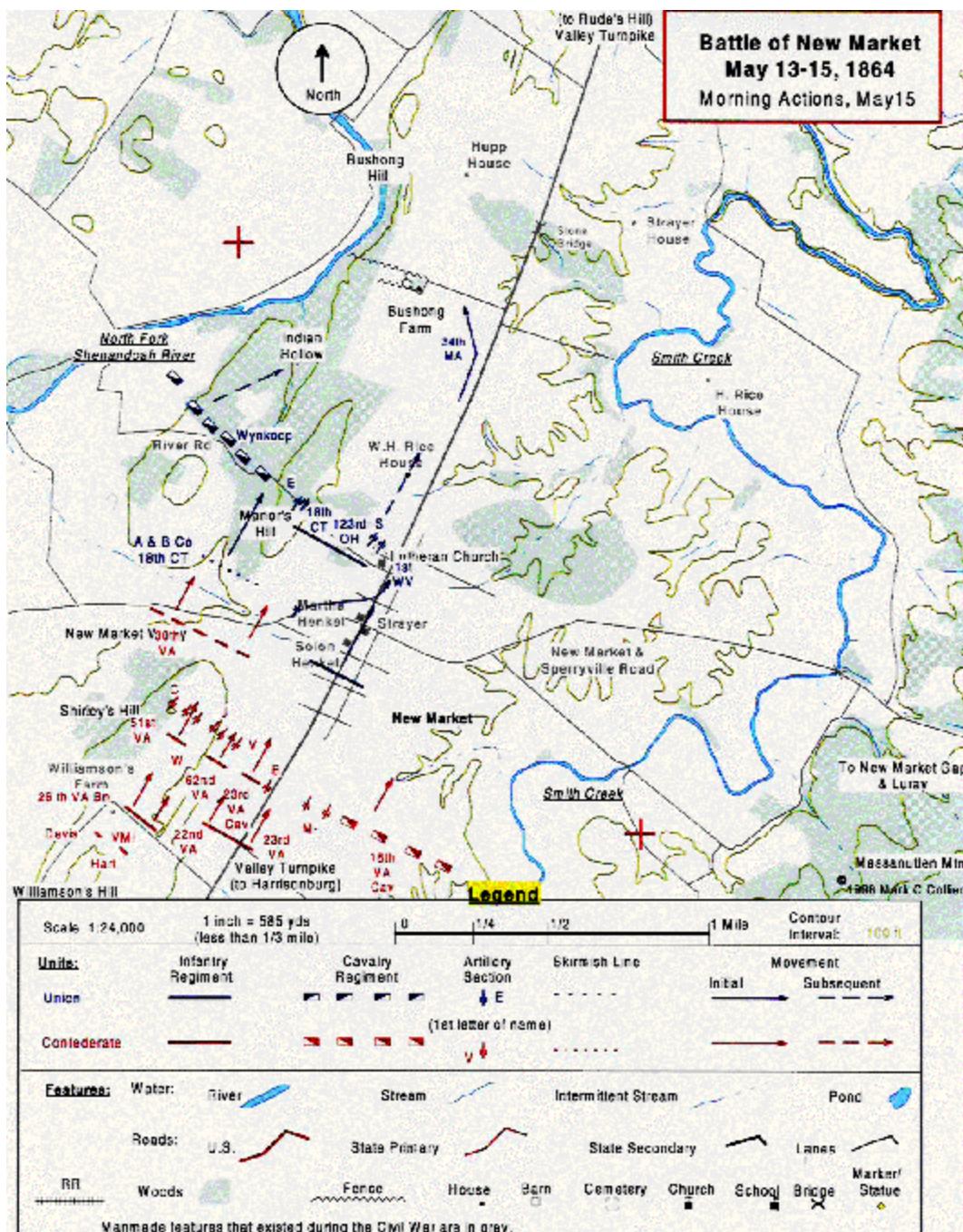
Source: "Bed and Breakfast Hospitality in the Shenandoah Valley." URL: <<http://www.bbhs.org>>. Accessed 19 February 2001.





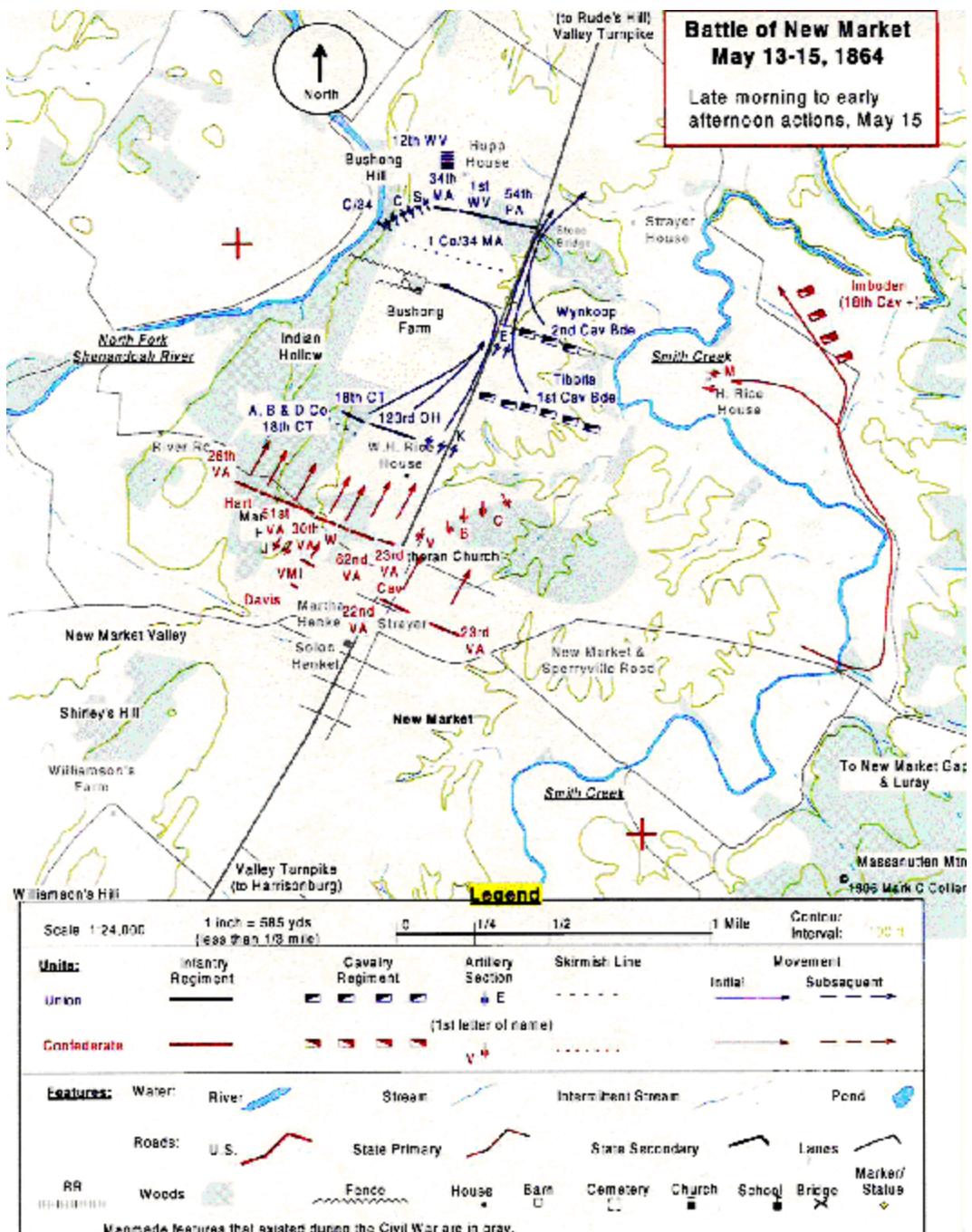
Map 4. Battle of New Market, Preliminary Operations, 13-14 May 1864

Source: "Battle maps of actions around New Market, Sunday May 15, 1864," *Battle Profiles*. URL: <http://ourworld.cs.com/ ht_a/rddilts/id29_m.htm>. Accessed 14 August 2000.



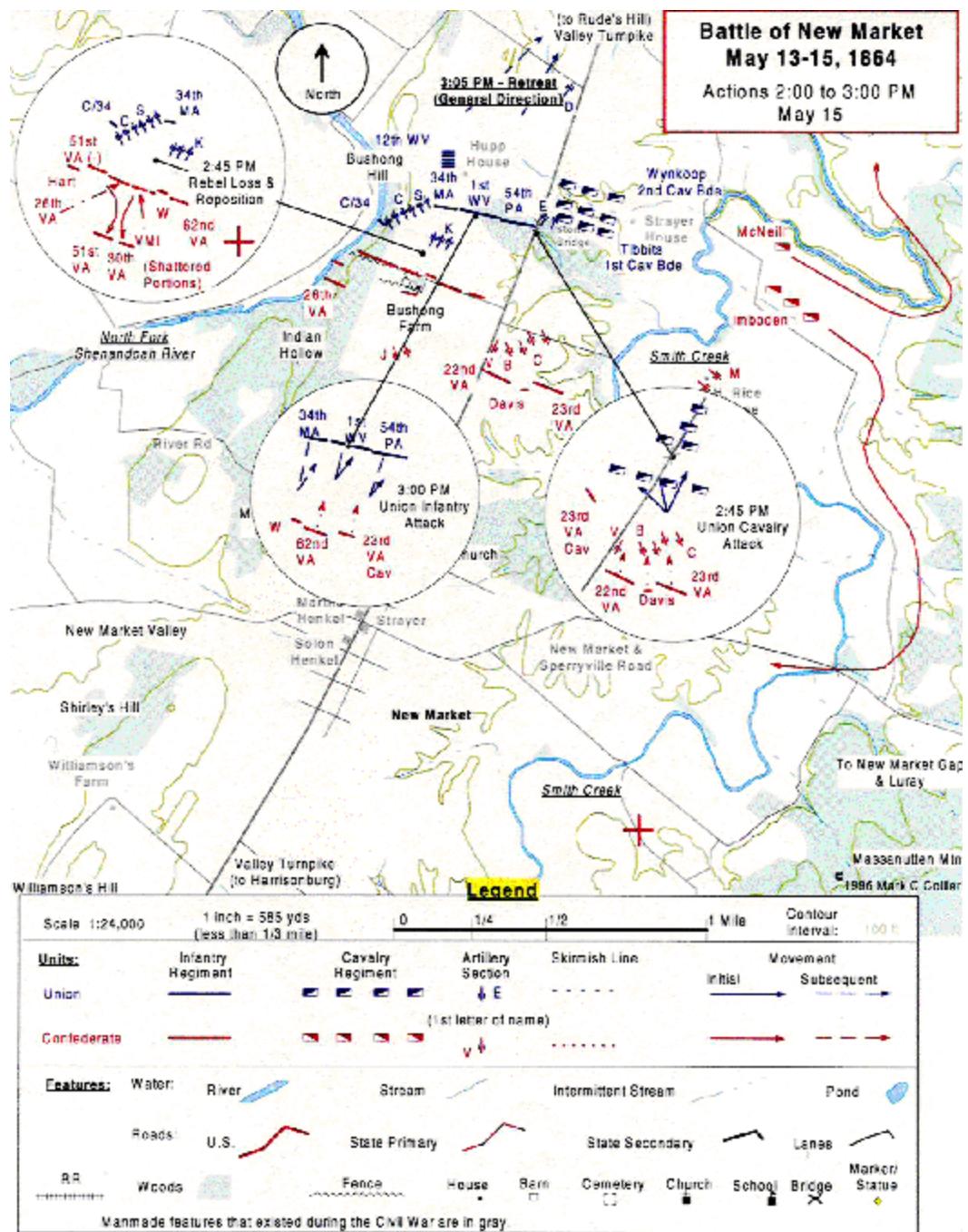
Map 5. Battle of New Market, Morning Actions, 15 May 1864

Source: "Battle maps of actions around New Market, Sunday May 15, 1864," *Battle Profiles*. URL: <http://ourworld.cs.com/ht_a/rddilts/id29_m.htm>. Accessed 14 August 2000.



Map 6. Battle of New Market, Mid-Day Actions, 15 May 1864

Source: "Battle maps of actions around New Market, Sunday May 15, 1864," *Battle Profiles*. URL: <http://ourworld.cs.com/_ht_a/rddilts/id29_m.htm>. Accessed 14 August 2000.



Map 7. Battle of New Market, Afternoon Actions, 15 May 1864

Source: "Battle maps of actions around New Market, Sunday May 15, 1864," *Battle Profiles*. URL: <http://ourworld.cs.com/_ht_a/rddilts/id29_m.htm>. Accessed 14 August 2000.



Figure 3. VMI Barracks, June 1864

Source: “War in the Shenandoah Valley, Summer 1864, ‘Hunter’s Raid’ on Lexington, Virginia—General David Hunter and the Burning of the Virginia Military Institute,” (Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Military Institute Archives). URL: <<http://www.vmi.edu/~archhtml/hunter.html>>. Accessed 22 August 2000.